

MEMORY ON THE FALLING PLANE



A Romantic Novella
Khawlah S Alqanbar

Written with love,

Where you can't forget
Your first true fallings.

ATC: "Good morning, flight 340. The weather is clear, 20 °C, with light winds, cruising at an altitude of 35,000 feet. Have a nice trip pilot."

"Good morning, tower. Flight 340, 20 °C, clear for takeoff, cruising at 35,000. Thanks, we're ready to go". Noah wasn't sure about the weather and the clouds

After 3 hours of the flight, Noah felt something was off with the plane. He was checking the engine, and his heart dropped when he lost control of the plane.

Noah was trying to wake pilot Mick up, "Mick, Mick, wake up!! I lost control of the plane. The weather is too windy, and I lost control of the ATC tower. We need to land at the nearest runway that's 250 km away.

"Are you serious Noah? I just slept for 2 hours, and all that happens?". Mick was trying to manage the plane with the winds. "I don't think we will make it, we will crash."

Before

“Hey, look, it’s that stupid girl again,” Liam said as he put his lunch tray on the table. “God, why is she always with weirdos? Can’t she find someone else to be friends with other than Leah?”

“Henry, Liam, shut up,” Noah said. “She’s not that weird. She’s just like that. Finish your lunch, we have math class after this.”

“What, Noah? Did we say something wrong?” Liam replied, chewing on his fries. “She is weird. Yesterday, I saw her sleeping in the library. Do you think that’s something people normally do?”

Noah took a sip of his orange juice and said, “At least she’s good in school. We’re in the same chemistry class, and she’s the smartest one.”

“Well, good for her. I’m not that bad either. School just isn’t for me. I’m only here because of my mom; she wants me to stay,” Liam said with a shrug.

The bell rang. Noah stood up, grabbed his tray, and walked away without saying a word.

Later, after math class, Noah went to his locker to get his chemistry book. As he turned the corner, he saw Liam and Henry laughing while knocking Scarlett's books out of her hands.

"Guys, enough!" Noah shouted.

He didn't wait for a response. He walked straight to chemistry class, gripping his book tightly. Once he sat down, he started spinning his pencil between his fingers. Scarlett walked past him, and for the first time, she looked at him and smiled.

"God, she has light brown eyes, and her smile lit up something in my heart, her hair turns onto golden color when the sunlight hits her blond hair," Noah whispered to himself. Noah turns to her to look at her when the chemistry teacher walks in.

"Ok class, tomorrow we have a test on chapters 5 and 6, open your books to page 129."

After Noah finishes school, he walks to his car without even saying goodbye to his friends. Once Noah starts the car, Liam comes up to him and knocks on the window. Liam said while Noah pulled down the window.

“Aren’t you coming to tonight's party at Lock’s?” Noah was about to respond to Laim’s question when he saw Scarlett walking to her bike. Noah pulled up the window and drove toward Scarlett. Liam screamed, “Hey! You almost ran over my feet.”

Noah follows Scarlett cautiously, trying to be slow without her noticing him.

“Why is she going to this scary neighborhood? Is she even safe living here?” Scarlett shouted, “Dad! Drunk as usual. When will you feel responsible? You were out like a homeless person for 4 days. Aren’t you weird about me being alone in this neighborhood? I was alone for 4 days without water or electricity.

“You are not a baby, Scarlett. You’re 17. I don’t care if you come home or not, just pay for this small apartment. I want to take a shower, and I need light to study.”

“If you’re not happy here, you can leave.” “Yeah, I will.” Scarlett took her bag and left the apartment. Noah saw Scarlett leave the building crying.

Scarlett went to the nearby library. Noah was confused why she left crying, “Is she pretty every time, even when she is sad?” Noah followed her to the library.

“Scarlett, you can’t stay here. Go back to your dad, and I know he’s dangerous, but you can’t sleep in the library.” Said the librarian while putting the books on the shelves. “Please, just this night. I need to study. I don’t want to go to my dad’s, he will bring his friends, I don’t feel safe around them because of what happened last time.”

“I wish I could help, but my shift is over now. I must leave.” Noah listened to the librarian and Scarlett’s conversation. Noah whispered to himself, “What did they do to you, Scarlett?”

The library was so quiet that Noah listened to Scarlett's stomach. Noah smiled. Scarlett saw an

apple on the librarian's table, and she ate it like she had never eaten before.

Noah left the library quietly, so Scarlett didn't notice him. Noah was thinking about Scarlett being a made. Noah furiously said, "I can't let that happen."

"Dad!" Scarlett shouted when she saw her dad and his friend enter the library. Scarlett's dad said as he was trying to pull her, "Scarlett, come on, I should get back home."

"Don't pull my hands, you're hurting me, Dad." Noah was in his car and saw Scarlett's father pulling her, and he was about to help her, but he stopped when he saw he had a gun in his hand.

After

"Can you hear me? Pilot? Thank God he's breathing. This place is chaos, a lot of dead bodies

in here. I can barely walk, my foot is swollen. I can hear someone crying for help.”

A voice said with pain. “Anybody, please help. I broke my leg, I can’t move.”

She moved toward the voice. “Oh god, this is so bad,” she whispered. My name is Scarlett James, and I’m a nurse. And I know you’re hurting, but I want you to be calm. I will help you, but first, let me find something to stabilize your feet.”

“So, what’s your name?” Scarlett asked while she helped him. “Josh. You’re a good nurse, I can see that because I’m a retired Doctor.”

“This is amazing. I need your help. I think the pilot is in a coma. Can you help him, even with your broken leg?” Scarlett asked.

“It’s fine, don’t worry about me. Where is he now? I want to check up on him, ” Josh said, and tried to get up.

Scarlett helped the doctor walk, his broken leg making each step painful. They reached the pilot, who lay motionless, blood staining his face. The

nurse whispered, “He’s in a coma, nothing we can do.”

The doctor ignored her, kneeling beside the pilot. He checked for a pulse, nothing. His hands trembled as he moved to check his chest, his breath catching in his throat. No rise. No fall. His heart wasn’t beating.

For a split second, the world seemed to freeze. This can’t be happening, he thought, panic rising.

“Come on!” The pilot’s pulse flickered, weak, barely there. The doctor leaned in closer, fighting his own dread. Stay with me, he thought, pushing his fear aside.

With trembling hands, he forced himself to focus, pushing harder, willing the heart to fight. Every second felt like an eternity.

Before

Noah's fingers gripped the steering wheel so tightly that his hands were trembling. His heart pounded, thumping hard against his ribs, almost too loud to hear anything else. He'd been following Scarlett for what felt like forever. He should've turned around. He should've gone home. But something kept him here, kept his foot heavy on the gas as he watched her, her father, and the giant man walking side by side, dragging her through the night.

His eyes kept darting to Scarlett. She was so small next to them, her shoulders hunched, her head down. She looked like she was barely holding it together, like the weight of her father's grip was the only thing keeping her on her feet. And yet, all Noah could think was how much she didn't deserve this.

He could drive away. He could leave them behind, pretend he never saw any of it. But when his eyes met hers, when he saw that small flicker

of fear in her eyes, a silent plea for help, he knew he couldn't.

His foot hovered over the gas pedal. One sharp turn. A crash. The distraction would give her a chance to break free. Maybe she'd run. Maybe she'd be safe.

But his gut twisted. What if it didn't work? What if he messed up? What if she got hurt even worse? His mind raced, spiraling out of control. He wasn't a hero. He didn't know what he was doing.

But then Scarlett's father pulled her even harder, yanking her with a speed that almost knocked her off balance. And Noah saw it, saw how small, how fragile she looked, how easily she could snap.

He slammed his foot down on the gas.

The crash happened too quickly. It wasn't the clean, controlled swerve he'd planned. Metal crumpled, glass shattered, and the world spun into chaos. Noah's body jerked forward with the impact, his chest slamming against the seatbelt. Everything went black for a split second. When his

eyes cleared, all he could hear was the ringing in his ears.

He blinked, trying to steady himself. The car was a mess, but worse, the car was empty of any control, and Scarlett

Noah's heart dropped into his stomach as he looked to the front. She was there, sprawled across the front seat, her head a bloody mess. Her face was pale, her eyes closed. His throat tightened as panic flooded his chest. This wasn't supposed to happen. Not like this.

He stumbled out of the car, his legs shaky. His mind was scrambling, trying to figure out what to do, how to fix this. But all he could think about was her, her face, her blood. His breath caught in his throat.

He barely heard her father at first, yelling at him, his voice a shrill mix of anger and disbelief.

"What the hell did you do?" Her father's voice cracked, his fists clenched as he looked at the wrecked car. "You ruined my damn car!"

Noah's eyes went to the old sedan. It was totaled, front end smashed in, the engine was smoking. And then he saw the look in her father's eyes. It wasn't worry, or panic, or even regret. It was frustration. His car. His damn car. That's all he cared about.

"You're not gonna fix it!" Noah shouted, his voice shaking with a mix of anger and fear. "We need to get her to a hospital!"

The other man stepped forward, eyes narrowed in judgment as he stared down at Scarlett's limp body.

"She's not important," he sneered, voice dripping with disdain. "She'll be fine. We've got other things to do."

Noah's chest tightened, his heart pounding in his throat. His hands shook. He couldn't believe it. This was her father, this was the man who was supposed to care for her, protect her, and all he saw was a worthless car.

He swallowed hard, trying to stay calm, but the anger was bubbling up inside him. "I'm taking her to the hospital," he said, voice low but firm. "Now. Or you'll regret it."

The other man barely seemed to care, just shrugging as if it didn't matter. And her father. He didn't even argue. He just turned away.

Noah went to Scarlett, gently pulling her from the wreckage. She was barely breathing, her body so limp in his arms. He could feel the blood soaking through his shirt, her head heavy in his hands. Her breath was shallow, faint. She wasn't in a coma, but she wasn't waking up either.

The rage bubbled inside him, mixing with the sick feeling in his stomach. He looked down at Scarlett's pale face, at the blood on her skin, and all he could think was how unfair it was. She didn't deserve this. She didn't deserve to be treated like nothing. And her father, her father had just walked away, like it didn't matter. Like she didn't matter.

Noah clenched his jaw, his eyes hard with determination. He wasn't leaving her like this. Not after everything she'd been through. He turned, carrying her quickly to his car, his mind racing with thoughts he couldn't quite process. He was going to make sure she was okay. No one else was going to fail her.

Noah's hands were shaking as he tried to start the car. His forehead was covered in sweat, and his heart was beating fast. The engine didn't start, and just smoke came out. The smoke made it hard to think, hard to breathe.

Scarlett was next to him, still not waking up. She looked so pale, and there was blood on her head. It was everywhere. Noah felt like time was running out.

He grabbed his phone. The screen was black. It wasn't turning on. "No, no, no!" he said under his breath, pressing the power button again and again. Nothing. No signal. No battery. Nothing. "Shit!" he shouted and hit the dashboard with his fist.

He looked out the window and saw Scarlett's father just standing there. Not moving. Not helping. Noah opened the door and yelled, "Please! Call an ambulance! My phone is dead! Please, just help!"

Her father didn't even look worried. His voice was cold. "If you want to help her, figure it out yourself," he said. "We already called our friend. He's coming for us. Not for her. You're the one who wants to save her, so deal with it."

Noah couldn't believe what he was hearing. Scarlett was hurt, maybe dying, and her father didn't care. He was acting like she didn't matter at all.

"You're her father!" Noah shouted. "You're supposed to care! She's bleeding, and all you care about is yourself?"

Her father didn't move. His friend just looked away and lit a cigarette, like it wasn't their problem.

Noah felt like he was going to explode. His chest was heavy, his hands tight. He looked back at Scarlett.

"You have to get her out of here," he whispered.

Scarlett's father and his friend didn't seem to care anymore. Their friend was arriving, ready to pick them up. They started walking away, leaving Noah standing there with a fainted Scarlett in his arms. The noise from the wreckage was all he could hear. The world felt muffled, like he was trapped in his own head, struggling to breathe.

He couldn't believe it. He couldn't leave her like this. But he didn't know what to do. His phone was dead, and his car wouldn't start.

Then he saw him.

An old man was standing on the corner of the street, his face wrinkled with age, his clothes ragged, but his eyes were clear. He wasn't in any rush. He was just watching, like everyone else had done.

Noah sprinted toward him, his desperation clear in every step. "Please," he begged, his voice breaking. "Please, just call an ambulance. Just call the ambulance, that's all. Please."

The old man didn't move at first. He just stared at Noah, his eyes full of something Noah couldn't place. But then, after what felt like a century, the man nodded slowly, pulling out a dusty phone from his pocket.

"Okay, kid," he said softly, pressing the phone to his ear. "I'll call."

Noah's heart skipped a beat. He couldn't wait any longer. He just hoped it wasn't too late. He returned to check up on Scarlett.

"I'm here, please stay strong", he whispered. Her arm slipped down while he was trying to warm her hand from the cold.

"Scarlett?" Noah said with a trembling voice. Her body felt cold.

After

Scarlett's hands shook as she pressed down on Noah's chest, her mind racing, desperate for him to breathe. The doctor's voice was a distant blur in the background, but all she could hear was the thudding of her own heart. Sweat ran down her face, mixing with the panic that made it hard to focus.

"I don't know who you are," she whispered, voice shaky. "But I really want to help you."

Something about him felt familiar, but she couldn't place it. She tried not to think about it. She needed to save him, not figure out who he was.

She glanced over at the doctor. He was sitting there, helpless, his leg twisted awkwardly, eyes full of fear. He wasn't in any condition to help.

Scarlett's hands moved faster, harder. She counted in her head, over and over, but nothing was happening. His chest stayed still, his lips turning blue.

"Please," she begged, her voice breaking. "Please, just breathe." She pressed harder, her chest tight with fear. "Come on, you can't, you can't just die."

Time felt like it was standing still. Minutes passed, but it felt like hours. Every second without him waking up felt like a punch to the gut.

Scarlett's hands were moving frantically, pushing harder against Noah's chest, when a scream ripped through the air. It wasn't her own. It came from the doctor.

"Snake! Something, something bit me!" he shouted, his voice trembling with panic.

Scarlett's heart lurched in her chest. She quickly looked up, but she couldn't see anything, nothing to explain the sudden terror in his voice.

The doctor clutched at his leg, stumbling backward, his face contorted in pain. He collapsed,

eyes wide with shock. “I, I’m poisoned,” he gasped, struggling to breathe. “I, I can’t.

Before Scarlett could even react, the doctor’s body went limp, his final breath escaping in a soft wheeze.

Her heart dropped. The man who had been her only hope of saving Noah was gone in an instant.

But then, just as everything seemed hopeless, Noah’s chest rose. It was faint, but it was there. His heart was beating again. A weak, fragile pulse.

Scarlett froze, staring at him. She wasn’t sure if it was real or if her mind was playing tricks on her, but she saw it. His heart had started again. He was breathing. Not awake. Not yet. But he was alive.

Tears blurred her vision as she looked back at the doctor. His body was still, lifeless, and the reality hit her hard. She had lost him. She had lost the only person who could help her save Noah.

Her breath caught in her throat, and she felt a sharp pain in her chest. How could this be happening? She couldn’t lose both.

But she couldn’t stop now. Not when the pilot's heart was beating. Not when he had a chance.

Scarlett's hands were shaking as she pressed down on the pilot's chest, counting in her head, trying to revive him. Then, a loud scream tore through the air, cutting her off.

The doctor who had been watching helplessly, his leg twisted beneath him, was on the ground now, clutching at his side. "Snake, something bit me!" he shouted, his voice high with panic.

Scarlett's heart skipped a beat. She whipped around, trying to see where the threat was, but the jungle was silent now, too quiet.

The doctor's eyes widened in shock, his breath coming in short gasps. "Poisoned, I can't breathe." He collapsed backward, hands scrambling at his chest.

"Doctor, no!" Scarlett rushed to him, but it was too late. His body went limp, eyes wide, mouth slightly open as the poison took him.

Scarlett's breath caught in her throat. This wasn't supposed to happen. First Noah, and now the only person who could help her.

But then, a miracle happened.

The pilot chest moved. Slowly. A tiny rise and fall, almost like a whisper of life. His heart his weak, still-beating heart.

She froze, looking between the two, the pilot is alive, but not awake; the doctor, gone.

Tears stung her eyes. She wanted to scream, but nothing came out. What was she supposed to do now?

When the pilot's eyes flickered open, everything felt wrong. The pain in his chest was unbearable, and his mind was clouded. His thoughts were slow, like the pieces of a puzzle scattered just out of reach.

"Where am I?" he whispered, trying to sit up, but the world spun around him, forcing him to stay still.

Scarlett was by his side, watching him closely, her heart hammering. She had been so focused on keeping him alive that she hadn't let herself think about what it would be like when he woke up. Now that he was conscious, her heart ached seeing him in such a vulnerable state.

"Take it easy," she said softly, trying to keep her voice steady. "You're safe now."

His eyes darted around the place, confused. “My flight crew, the attendants, my girlfriend, where are they?”

Scarlett’s breath hitched. She had been bracing for this question, but hearing it aloud made it even harder to bear. “You’re the only one left. Most of the people on the flight didn’t survive. The attendants, they were with you.”

He didn’t seem to hear her words, his face a picture of disbelief. “No, they have to be.” He tried to sit up again, pushing himself up weakly. His voice cracked. “My girlfriend, she was with me. Please tell me she’s okay.”

Scarlett closed her eyes for a moment, taking a shaky breath. She could still hear the crash, the screams, the chaos of everything falling apart. But she had to stay strong for him.

His eyes shifted to the ground, his mind trying to process everything, but the fog in his head wouldn’t let him.

Scarlett, feeling a pang of guilt, looked around for any medical supplies that could help. She searched the wreckage of the plane, finding some emergency wipes and medical supplies. Then she

spotted her, the flight attendant. She was lying motionless, blood staining her clothes, but still breathing. Scarlett rushed over, grabbing alcohol wipes and bandages to help stop the bleeding.

When he saw her, his eyes widened. “That’s her. That’s my girlfriend,” he whispered, his voice barely audible.

Scarlett turned back to him, and as she stood there, her gaze caught something, a tattoo on his collarbone. It was a small, faded symbol, but it struck her like lightning. It was a matching tattoo. She knew it.

Her breath caught in her throat, and everything seemed to stop for a second. This was him. This was Noah. The person she had been trying to save, the one who reminded her so much of someone from her past.

He saw her glance down at his collarbone, noticing her reaction. “What’s wrong?” he asked, voice shaky.

Scarlett cleared her throat, forcing herself to look away for a moment. “What’s your name?” she asked quietly, trying to keep her composure. She had to know, had to hear him say it.

He blinked at her, confused. “Noah,” he said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

Scarlett’s heart stopped for a moment. She felt dizzy, the realization hitting her like a freight train. Her mind raced as the memories flooded back. She remembered the boy she had once known the one she had lost contact with, the one who had always been a part of her past. And now, here he was, alive, but with no memory of her.

She could hardly breathe. She wanted to say his name, to tell him everything, but she couldn’t. She couldn’t let him know who she was. Not yet.

Instead, she just nodded, forcing a smile that felt so bittersweet. “Noah,” she whispered, her voice barely audible, tears stinging her eyes.

He looked at her, still confused, and then his gaze shifted back to the flight attendant, the one he had cared so much about.

“Please,” Noah murmured, his voice full of desperation. “Tell me she’ll be okay.”

Scarlett’s heart broke. She didn’t know how to tell him the truth. How could she? The reality was

too painful. And yet, she was the one who was there, holding the pieces together.

“She’ll be okay,” Scarlett said, not entirely sure herself. “But you have to rest. We’ll figure this out.”

Noah’s eyes fluttered closed, exhaustion taking over him, but in his unconscious state, he was still murmuring her name.

Scarlett stood there, a mixture of relief and sorrow in her chest. She had wanted to tell him, wanted him to know, but how could she? This wasn’t the time.

When Noah saw her, his eyes widened. “That’s her. That’s my girlfriend,” he whispered, his voice barely audible.

Scarlett looked down at the injured flight attendant, her face pale and covered in blood, but still breathing. Her heart ached for this woman she didn’t know, but knew how important she was to Noah.

Noah looked at Scarlett, eyes searching her face for any sign of hope. “Is she okay?” he asked, his voice breaking.

Scarlett bit her lip, her mind racing. She couldn't lie to him, not when she wasn't sure herself. "I don't know," she said quietly, her voice trembling. "I'm doing everything I can to help her, but I'm not sure yet."

Noah's expression faltered, and he sank back into the dirt, his body shaking with exhaustion. "Please, just, tell me she's okay. She has to be."

Scarlett's chest tightened. She didn't have the heart to tell him, she wasn't even sure if this woman would make it through the next few hours. She couldn't say that to him, not when he looked so lost.

"She's being taken care of," Scarlett said instead, her voice quiet but firm. "But right now, we need to focus on you, Noah. You need to rest."

Before

Noah's heart pounded in his chest as he gently tried to warm up Scarlett's arms, rubbing his hands over her cold skin, desperate to get her to wake up. She was so pale, her breathing shallow and faint. The bleeding from her head had slowed, but he couldn't shake the feeling that something was terribly wrong.

He kept his eyes on her face, praying for her to open her eyes. To tell him she was alright.

But then, his grip on her hand slipped, and her limp arm fell to the ground, lifeless.

Noah's stomach dropped, and he quickly grabbed her hand again, his fingers trembling. "Scarlett?" he whispered urgently, his voice cracking. "Scarlett, please wake up, you have to wake up!"

His mind raced, but his heart was pounding too loud for him to think straight. He could feel the weight of the situation crashing down on him. He knew he couldn't afford to panic, but he couldn't help it. This wasn't supposed to happen. She was supposed to be fine. He had to make sure she was.

He shook her gently, still holding her hand, but there was no response. No sign that she heard him or even felt him.

“Please,” he whispered again, his voice almost breaking. “Don’t leave, Scarlett. Not like this.”

The cold wind brushed against his face, but it didn’t matter. All that mattered was her. Her pale face. The lack of life in her body.

Noah’s hands were shaking as he tried again, feeling the pulse in her wrist. Barely anything. A faint flutter. But it was something. He wasn’t sure if it was enough, but he couldn’t give up.

He took a deep breath, holding back the fear that wanted to break him. “Just hold on, Scarlett. Please.”

Noah heard the distant sound of sirens growing louder, and his heart skipped a beat. Relief surged through him, help was finally here. The ambulance arrived, tires screeching to a halt next to him, and paramedics jumped out, rushing to assess the situation.

“No! No, please,” Noah shouted as they began to take Scarlett from his arms. He followed them, his

pulse still racing, his breath coming in shallow gasps. They quickly loaded her into the back of the ambulance.

Noah climbed in after her, his hands still shaking. The doors slammed shut behind him, and he reached for Scarlett, needing to be close to her.

The paramedics quickly got to work, but then one of them turned to him, asking, "Who is she?"

Noah froze. His mind went blank. Who was she to him? The question that should have been easy to answer felt impossible now. He opened his mouth, but no words came.

He stared down at Scarlett's pale face. As the ambulance doors slammed shut behind them, one of the paramedics looked at Noah, his hands still shaking from the panic.

"Who is she to you?"

Noah hesitated. His eyes dropped to Scarlett's bruised face, still fainted, still bleeding. He swallowed hard.

"Someone I just knew," he said quietly. "Even though we've been around each other for a while. I don't know why I care this much, but I do."

The sirens wailed as the ambulance sped toward the hospital, but Noah's mind was lost in a fog of confusion and panic. Was he too late? Would she make it?

All he knew was that he would do anything to save her, even if he couldn't remember exactly why she felt so important to him.

The sound of sirens echoed in the distance, and Noah's heart raced as the ambulance pulled into the hospital parking lot. His grip tightened on Scarlett's hand, still holding her gently, not wanting to let go. The paramedics rushed to get them both out of the vehicle, Noah's mind spinning with worry and confusion. His thoughts were a blur, but all he could focus on was making sure Scarlett was okay.

Once they reached the emergency room, the paramedics quickly began wheeling Scarlett away. Noah's eyes followed them, his legs moving on their own as he hurried to keep up. As they reached the doors of the emergency section, one of the nurses stopped him.

"Sir, you can't go in there right now. She needs to be stabilized."

Noah's breath caught in his throat. "But I need to see her. Please, I just need to make sure she's okay."

The nurse's face softened a little, but she shook her head. "We'll take care of her. We're doing everything we can. Just wait here."

Noah's gaze lingered on the emergency doors, his worry growing heavier by the second. He had to see her, to know she was safe. He couldn't shake the image of her bleeding, barely breathing, her body limp and pale. He ran his hands through his hair in frustration, pacing back and forth.

Suddenly, the door to the waiting area opened, and Noah turned around, his eyes locking with a familiar face. Liam, his friend, was standing in the doorway. Liam's expression shifted from confusion to surprise.

"Noah? What the hell are you doing here?" Liam asked, his voice sharp, but the shock in his eyes clear.

Noah, caught off guard by seeing his friend, tried to mask his panic. "I don't know. I was just trying to help someone."

Liam raised an eyebrow. "Help someone? Dude, you were supposed to be at the party. I've been calling you for hours! What the hell happened?"

Noah's gaze dropped for a second, frustration creeping in. He hadn't thought about the party at all, hadn't thought about anything but Scarlett. "I, I just couldn't make it. Something happened. I needed to help her. I needed to save Scarlett's life."

Liam scoffed, his tone thick with sarcasm. "Help her? What? You skipped out on the party for her? She's not even your girlfriend, Noah. What are you even doing here?"

Noah's fists clenched at his sides, his frustration turning into something hotter. He stepped closer to Liam, his voice low and tight. "You don't get it, Liam. She's not just some random girl. She's hurt badly. And her father, I had to help her. I couldn't just leave her there."

Liam crossed his arms, raising an eyebrow. "Oh, so you're playing hero now? Is that why you skipped the fun, the party you promised to come to? You don't even know her that well, Noah. We've been busting our asses waiting for you, and now

you're here, acting all heroic. Is she your girlfriend or something?"

Noah's anger flared, and before he could stop himself, he threw a punch. It landed squarely on Liam's jaw, sending him stumbling back in shock. Blood trickled from Liam's lip as he stared at Noah, stunned.

"Don't you ever talk about her like that," Noah growled, his breath heavy with anger. "You have no idea what she's been through. You don't know what it's like to watch someone suffer because of someone else's cruelty."

Liam, recovering from the punch, wiped the blood from his lip and took a step back. "What the hell, Noah? You've really lost it, man."

Before either of them could say more, a doctor appeared in the doorway, cutting through the tension. His voice was firm, yet calming. "Hey! You two need to settle down. She's in critical condition, and we're doing everything we can. I'm afraid you need to back off."

Noah's shoulders sagged as he exhaled sharply. "Is she, is she okay?"

The doctor paused for a moment, his gaze softening. "She's stable for now. We've done what we can, but it's going to be a while. You can see her for a few minutes, but no more than that. She needs rest."

Noah's chest tightened as he followed the doctor to Scarlett's room. The sight of her lying there, pale and covered in bandages, sent a chill down his spine. She looked so fragile, like one small touch could break her.

He sat down beside her bed, his hands hovering over her, not sure where to begin. "I don't know why I'm here, Scarlett," he whispered to himself, his voice barely audible. "But I couldn't let you die. I couldn't just leave you."

The silence in the room was deafening. Noah's hand reached for hers, the coldness of her skin sending a shiver through him. He didn't know how long he'd be able to stay like this, but he wasn't going anywhere. Not without knowing that she was safe.

As he sat there, his eyes locked onto her face, he couldn't shake the feeling that something deep had changed. He'd saved her life.

Noah sat beside Scarlett's bed, his heart still racing, his hands trembling as he reached out for her. Noah's fingers lightly traced Scarlett's hair, the delicate strands still soft despite the blood that had stained them earlier. His heart pounded as he spoke, trying to keep the desperation in his voice at bay. "Please, Scarlett, open your eyes. I can't forget your chocolatey eyes from that day, from when you looked at me. When you glanced at me for just two seconds, it felt like time froze. I couldn't breathe. Please, just wake up."

As he spoke, his eyes drifted to her collarbone. His hand hovered there, and he noticed the faint burn mark, likely from a cigarette, a scar that he imagined her father had caused. The anger surged in him again, a sharp pain in his chest. How could anyone do this to their own child?

Suddenly, Scarlett's body shifted, and her eyes fluttered open. She groaned softly, barely audible. Noah's heart skipped a beat. "Scarlett?" he whispered, his voice trembling with relief and hope.

She blinked, her vision blurred, and her gaze darted around the room. She looked confused, disoriented, as if the world didn't quite make sense to her. Her lips parted, and weakly, she mumbled, "Where's my father? Where is he?"

Noah's chest tightened. Her father? He swallowed hard, trying to keep his voice steady. "Scarlett, your father, he's not here. He left you. He doesn't care about you. He left you there, all alone." His voice cracked slightly, but he kept going, fighting back his own pain. "I saved you. You're safe now."

She blinked slowly, trying to process his words, but she was still lost, her mind foggy from the injury. "I'm cold," she whispered, shivering slightly, her body trembling despite the warmth in the room.

Noah's heart broke for her. Without thinking, he immediately stood up, quickly shrugging off his jacket. He draped it gently over her shoulders, trying to give her some comfort. "It's okay, Scarlett," he whispered softly. "You're safe now. Just rest."

But as he did, Scarlett looked up at him, still confused, and the question left her lips before she could stop it. “Why are you here? Why are you helping me?” Her voice trembled as she tried to understand.

Noah froze, the weight of her question sinking deep into his chest. He didn’t know what to say. How could he explain why he was here, why he couldn’t walk away? The last thing she remembered was him with his friend, Liam, and Henry bullying her at school.

Her voice was quiet, almost inaudible. “The last thing I remember, you were with Liam and Henry.” Her words trailed off, the memory clouded and painful.

Noah’s face tightened with regret. “I’m sorry about that,” he said, his voice soft. “I should’ve done something. I should’ve helped you then. But I’m here now. And I’m not leaving you.” He could feel her confusion, her vulnerability, and he knew she wasn’t ready to trust him fully, not after what had happened.

He reached out to gently touch her hand, trying to reassure her, his heart pounding in his chest. “You’re safe. Just rest now. I will call the nurse.”

After

Noah's eyes were wide with panic as he looked at Scarlett, his voice shaking with desperation. "Please," he begged, his hands trembling as he reached out toward Mona. "You have to help her. Please, I don't care what you need to do, just save her! She's my girlfriend. Her name is Mona. She's a flight attendant."

His words cracked as he spoke, his emotions spilling out in a rush. "She's everything to me. Please, you have to save her. I can't lose her. I don't know what I'll do without her."

Scarlett stood frozen, her heart aching at the raw pain in his voice. The desperation in his eyes was like nothing she'd ever seen before. He was so desperate, so in love with this girl. She could see it in the way he spoke, in the way his hands shook as he reached out to Mona.

Noah turned to Scarlett again, his voice barely a whisper. "You saved me. You have to save her too. Please, I'll do anything. Just please don't let her die."

Scarlett didn't know how to respond. She felt a pang in her chest, watching Noah like this. He was still so helpless, still so broken, and here he was, looking at her like she was the only person who could fix it all.

She took a deep breath, trying to steady herself. "I'll do everything I can," she said quietly, her voice breaking slightly as she tried to control the emotions that were threatening to spill over. "I promise I will."

Noah nodded, his eyes locked on Mona's pale face, his desperation never fading. "Thank you," he whispered.

Noah's eyes stayed on Scarlett, but something was off. There was something about her, something familiar, but he couldn't quite figure it out. He kept staring at her eyes, those chocolatey brown eyes, like he should know them. It felt like he had seen them before, but no matter how hard he tried, nothing clicked.

Scarlett could feel him looking at her, but she couldn't bring herself to meet his gaze. Her chest tightened as she stood there, wanting to tell him everything, to remind him who she was, but she couldn't. The words were stuck. How could she?

How could she even tell him when he didn't even remember her?

She wanted to say something, anything, but it felt like the longer she stayed silent, the more she was just a stranger to him. He was right in front of her, but so far away. Her heart ached, her mind racing with so many questions. Did he really forget her? How could he forget?

Noah blinked, as if trying to shake something loose from his mind. He studied her face, his expression confused. His voice came out almost like a whisper. "I know you." As if he could almost grasp it, almost remember.

Scarlett's breath hitched. She wanted to scream, to tell him who she was, to tell him everything. But she just couldn't. She couldn't do it. Not when he didn't even remember her.

His eyes lingered on hers, and she saw the struggle there. She could feel it, he was trying so hard to figure it out, trying to piece together. But nothing came. He just couldn't remember, and it broke her.

Then, suddenly, they heard a sound, a breath, labored and uneven. Both of them turned quickly. It was Mona.

As Scarlett moved to check on Mona, she couldn't help but feel the weight of the moment. She was saving them, but in doing so, she was reminded of how little Noah even recognized her. It was as if she didn't even exist, just someone trying to help. She'd known him once, years ago, and yet he didn't even know who she was now.

Noah wasn't looking at her anymore. His focus was entirely on Mona, the girl who meant everything to him, the one he was so desperate to protect. Scarlett felt the ache grow inside her, but she pushed it down. This wasn't about her. It was about Mona.

Then, finally, Mona's chest heaved with a sharp intake of breath, and Scarlett's heart skipped. She looked up, her eyes meeting Noah's, and she saw the relief flood his face.

Mona's eyes fluttered open, her gaze blurry at first, but when she saw Noah, a soft, shaky smile appeared on her lips. "Oh Noah," she whispered, her voice barely audible.

Noah, his face flooding with emotion, took her hand gently in his. "I'm here, Mona. I'm here."

Scarlett stepped back, watching them with a bittersweet feeling. She had saved them. But she couldn't help but feel like a stranger in the room. Noah had his eyes only for Mona, the girl who had his heart. And Scarlett? She was just the one who had put the pieces back together, but Noah's heart wasn't hers to claim anymore. It never had been.

As Scarlett wandered through the debris, searching for anything remotely useful, her steps slowed when she heard quiet laughter coming from behind her, Mona's voice, soft and playful.

"Ohh," Mona purred, "I forgot how much I loved this tattoo," her fingers lightly trailing over Noah's collarbone. "Still looks hot on you, babe."

Scarlett looked away, not wanting to hear more. She stepped deeper into the wreckage, and her eyes landed on something half-buried under a metal panel.

A broken mirror. She knelt down slowly and picked it up. Her own reflection stared back at her, tired eyes, dirt-streaked cheeks, lips trembling just slightly.

She held the shard close, and, with one hesitant hand, she pulled down the collar of her shirt, just enough to see it. Her tattoo faded a little over the years, but it's still there. Right over her collarbone, the same place as Noah's, the same shape.

Before

Noah got up from the chair, ready to call a nurse, when Scarlett suddenly grabbed his wrist. Her hand was weak, but firm enough to stop him.

"Why are you even here?" she demanded. "Why now? You and your friends, Liam, Henry. You treated me like crap. You bullied me. So, what? What's your angle? What do you want from me?"

Noah felt a heavy weight in his chest. She was right. He had been part of that group, part of the problem. He hadn't been as bad as the others, but he still didn't stand up for her when he should've.

He'd just gone along with it, too scared to do anything different.

"I know," he said, his voice quiet but sincere. "You're right. I wasn't kind to you. I can't change that, and I'm sorry. I really am."

Scarlett's eyes narrowed. She pulled her hand back, still looking at him like she was waiting for something more.

"So why are you here?" she asked, her voice softer but still full of disbelief. "You hate me, don't you? You've always hated me. So why are you sitting here acting like you care?"

Noah felt the guilt crush him, but he couldn't look away from her. He needed her to understand.

"I didn't want to hurt you, Scarlett," he said, his voice thick with regret. "I went along with it because I didn't know how to stop it. But I can't just pretend it didn't happen, not anymore. I know I messed up. And I'm sorry. I can't change the past, but I want to help now. I want to make things right, even if it's just for now."

Scarlett stared at him, her face hard with anger, but her eyes. Her eyes were different. He could see

something soft behind all that hurt, like she wanted to believe him, but couldn't.

"Yeah, and what about my dad?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper. "What about him? You think you can make up for everything he's done, too?"

Noah's chest tightened. He thought of her father, the way he'd treated her, and it made his stomach churn.

"No," Noah said quietly. "I can't make up for what he did. But he's not here, Scarlett. You're on your own now. I don't expect you to trust me or forgive me. But I'm not leaving you here alone. I'll stay. I'll help you, whatever you need."

For a long moment, Scarlett didn't say anything. She just looked at him, like she was trying to figure out if he was being real or just pretending. Finally, she let out a breath, her expression softening just a little.

"Fine," she whispered. "But don't think I'm going to forget everything you and your friends did."

Noah nodded, guilt still heavy in his chest. "I know. And I don't expect you to."

He reached for her hand again, hesitating for just a second. This time, Scarlett didn't pull away. She just watched him, unsure, but not rejecting him. And for the first time, Noah felt like maybe he could make up for some of the wrongs he'd done.

As Scarlett looked into Noah's eyes, she couldn't help but notice the dark green hue that seemed to flicker under the dim light. They weren't completely green, but enough to make them stand out, enough to catch her breath for a second.

He's not that bad after all, she thought, her mind swirling. Despite everything, everything he had been a part of, the things he and his friends had done to her, Noah wasn't the real source of her pain. It was Liam and Henry who had tormented her the most. Noah had stood by and watched, but he hadn't been the one doing the bullying. Still, that didn't excuse it. Yet, as she looked at him now, there was something different in the way he was looking at her, something softer.

Maybe he can change, she thought, the idea slowly forming in her mind. Maybe things can be different now. Maybe we can just be friends? The idea seemed almost too impossible, but a part of her wanted to believe it. Wanted to believe that somehow, after everything, things could go down a

different path. Maybe, just maybe, this moment could be the start of something new.

Scarlett blinked a few times, pulling herself back to the present. She looked at Noah again, this time with a quieter gaze. There was a moment of silence before her stomach grumbled loudly, making her cheeks turn red. She glanced away, feeling embarrassed, but then sighed, gathering the courage to speak.

“I’m, I’m starving,” she said softly, looking down at her hands. “I haven’t eaten in two days, I think. Can you get me something? Anything. I just need something to eat.”

Noah didn’t hesitate. His eyes softened as he saw the vulnerability in her, the way she was almost too shy to ask. “Of course,” he said, his voice calm. “I’ll get you something. I’ll tell the nurses you’re awake and get food for you. I’ll be right back.”

He stepped toward the door, then paused and looked back at her with a reassuring smile. “Just rest for now. I’ll make sure you’re taken care of.”

Noah stepped out of the room to speak with the nurses. He told them Scarlett was awake and needed some food. He made sure they understood

she was starving, and that they'd need to help her get something to eat quickly.

As Scarlett lay in the hospital bed, her thoughts drifted back to that night. The night her world broke.

She remembered the sound of the gunshot. The loud, piercing crack that seemed to echo through the entire house. It was so sudden, so sharp, it felt like it would never end. Her mother had been trying to protect her, stopping her father from hitting her again. Scarlett hadn't done anything wrong, just some childish mistake, forgetting to walk the dogs, or breaking the TV remote by accident. It didn't matter. To her father, it was enough to set him off.

Her mother, despite all the fear in her eyes, had stepped between them, trying to stop the beating. She had told Scarlett's father that he wasn't going to hurt her anymore. But her father was furious. He dragged her mother into the other room, shouting, and then there was that noise—the loud, deafening shot that would haunt Scarlett for the rest of her life.

She was only seven, too young to understand, but she knew the terror in her mother's eyes, and the way Scarlett's father had looked at her, almost daring her to stop him. And then, the silence. Her mother, gone. Scarlett left alone in the hallway, her small hands trembling as she tried to process it all.

Now, here she was, in a hospital, trapped by the memories of that night, terrified that the man who had taken everything from her would come back for more. And Noah, who had tried so hard to help her, who had tried to save her life, was now in danger because of her father.

Scarlett squeezed her eyes shut, trying to escape the memories. The weight of everything was too much. What if Noah was next? "No, he can't get hurt."

Her heart was pounding, but just as the dark thoughts clouded her mind, the door creaked open, and the doctor entered with a nurse, snapping her back to reality. She quickly wiped away any trace of fear, trying to keep her calm. The nurse wheeled in a tray of food, placing it gently on the table beside her.

The doctor checked her vitals, glancing at Scarlett with a soft smile. "You're in good shape."

You can go home tomorrow morning, but take it easy for now. You might feel dizzy for a while. If you need anything, just let us know.”

Noah, who had been standing near the window, stepped forward and gave the doctor a brief nod. “Thanks,” he said. The doctor gave him a reassuring smile, then turned to leave, the nurse following close behind.

As soon as they were gone, Noah picked up the tray of food, walking back to Scarlett’s side. He sat down carefully beside her and reached for a spoon, ready to feed her. But as he pulled the spoon from the bowl, it slipped from his fingers and clattered to the floor. The noise was sharp, louder than it should have been in the quiet room.

Scarlett flinched, her body stiffening, her eyes wide with panic. She quickly pulled the blanket tighter around herself, as if she could hide from the world.

Noah froze, watching her, confusion spreading across his face. “Scarlett?” His voice was soft, but the concern was clear in his tone. “It’s just a spoon. You’re okay.”

He reached out, gently touching her shoulder, trying to calm her. "It's alright. No one's here but me. You're safe."

Scarlett, her chest heaving with shallow breaths, slowly met his gaze, but she didn't speak. Her eyes were distant, and her body trembled with an unspoken fear.

Noah sat beside her, his voice gentle but persistent. "Scarlett, what happened? Why are you scared? You can tell me."

There was a long silence between them, but finally, Scarlett spoke, her voice shaking. "I'm scared of what my father might do if he finds out you're here." Her eyes welled with tears, and she quickly looked away. "He killed my mother. I don't want him to hurt you too."

Noah's heart dropped at the raw pain in her voice. He couldn't even imagine what she had gone through, but he couldn't walk away from her either. "I'm not leaving you, Scarlett. I'm here to stay. I'm not scared of him. But I need to know. Why does he do this to you? What's happened?" His voice was full of quiet urgency.

She shook her head, her gaze clouded with fear and doubt. "You don't know what he's capable of. I don't want you involved in this. I can't lose you, too."

Noah gently wiped a tear from her cheek. "I'm not going anywhere. Please, tell me what happened. I want to know everything."

Scarlett hesitated, her breath shaky as she let the tears fall. "I don't want you to be a part of it. It's too dangerous. You can't Noah."

Noah leaned in closer, his voice steady. "I'm here, Scarlett. You don't have to carry this alone. Please, tell me. You're not alone anymore."

Scarlett closed her eyes for a moment, breathing deeply, as if deciding whether to trust him with the deepest parts of her past. Finally, her voice broke through, barely a whisper. "He's the reason my life is this way. He's the reason everything's broken."

Noah didn't look away. "I'm sorry. I wish I could change it. But I'll be here, no matter what."

After

Scarlett moved quietly through the wreckage, stepping carefully over twisted metal and scattered belongings. Most of the real food was gone, lost in the crash. Still, she managed to find a few half-squashed chocolate bars and a couple of smashed cake slices. It wasn't much, but it was something.

She brought them back and knelt down, offering the small stash to Mona and Noah.

Mona took one of the chocolate bars with a tired smile, still resting her head comfortably against Noah's chest. "You're really good at this," she murmured, her voice low and a little hoarse. "Helping people. It just seems natural to you."

Scarlett hesitated. Her eyes flicked to Noah for just a heartbeat. He didn't seem to notice, but then she locked eyes with Mona. There was something sharp beneath her calm, something tight in her chest that she didn't want to admit. Seeing Mona so close to him, like she belonged there, stirred something in Scarlett she couldn't quite explain, or stop.

She gave a faint smile, steadying her voice. "I'm a nurse," she said. "I was headed to the UK, had a contract with a hospital there for a couple of years. But then." Her eyes drifted briefly to the wreckage around them. "Well, the crash changed everything."

Mona nodded slowly, nibbling at the chocolate. Scarlett sat back a little, arms wrapped loosely around her knees. "I've been a nurse for 8 years," she added quietly. "Helping, it's just part of who I am."

Noah glanced at Scarlett, his expression softening with a hint of curiosity. "Hey, I just realized," he said quietly, his voice a bit rough. "I never even asked your name. After all this, you are helping us, staying calm. I feel like I should know who you are."

Scarlett paused for a moment before responding quietly, "I'm Scarlett." She looked at Noah for a split of second, something in her gaze as if she was waiting for recognition, but it never came. It was almost painful to see him like this, so close but so far away. She could feel the weight of the past pushing against her, the words she wanted to say caught in her throat.

She quickly forced a smile, though it didn't quite reach her eyes. "Nice to meet you both."

Noah stared at her, something flickering in his eyes, but he couldn't put his finger on it. "Scarlett," he whispered, trying to commit the name to memory. He felt like he should know her, but the more he thought, the more his head hurt. It felt like something was missing, but it wasn't coming back.

Mona, noticing Noah's discomfort, reached out to touch his arm. "Are you okay?" she asked softly.

"Yeah, just a headache," Noah said, rubbing his temples. "But Scarlett." He hesitated for a moment, then looked at her with a faint smile. "If you're free, Mona and I are having an engagement party soon. I'd like for you to be there. I mean, you've helped us so much. It's the least we can do."

Mona smiled at Scarlett warmly, clearly hoping she'd agree. But Scarlett just nodded, feeling a lump in her throat. She had saved them, but now she was just a stranger to them.

"Yeah, of course," Scarlett said, her voice a little quieter. She could feel the weight of the moment

pressing down on her, and even though she smiled, the pain inside wouldn't go away.

As the sun began to dip below the horizon, Scarlett walked slowly toward the water, her footsteps barely making a sound on the soft sand. The waves rolled in rhythmically, their gentle crash against the shore echoing in the quiet.

Noah, having carried Mona to a more comfortable spot where she could rest, walked up behind Scarlett. His gaze fell on her as she sat there, lost in thought. He paused for a moment, watching her before speaking up, his voice soft but sincere.

"You know," he said, his tone quieter than usual, "I can't help but feel like there's something weighing on you. The way you look at the ocean, like you're carrying something heavy. If you want to talk about it, I'm here. I owe you that much, at least. You saved me and well, me and Mona."

Scarlett let out a long sigh, crossing her arms over her chest as she continued to gaze out at the sea, the waves reflecting the last bits of sunlight. She rested her hands in the cool sand, her fingers gently tracing the grains. The peacefulness of the

moment was interrupted when Noah, stepping closer, accidentally brushed his hand against hers.

Scarlett's breath hitched for a moment, and she quickly pulled her arm back, wrapping it around herself defensively. She looked at him, her eyes slightly wide as if the touch had startled her. "No," she said quietly, her voice firm but not unkind. "I don't have anything to say."

For a moment, it felt like the world had paused. The fading light of the sunset cast soft shadows, making it hard for him to fully see, but he couldn't help the pull he felt in his chest. His gaze flickered to the tattoo on her collarbone, but he didn't look directly at it. The evening was growing darker, and Scarlett's presence seemed to fill the quiet space between them.

Scarlett held his gaze, her eyes deep and intense, as though she was trying to convey something unsaid, something unspoken that hung between them. It was almost as if Noah could feel a distant memory stirring, but it was gone as quickly as it appeared.

Noah stood motionless, his eyes locked on Scarlett, his gaze intense, as though something

about her was tugging at the edges of his memory. Mona came up to them, noticing his stare, and felt uneasy. She didn't understand why Noah was looking at Scarlett like that, as though she was the only thing that mattered in that moment.

Unable to ignore it any longer, Mona stepped forward and gently pulled at his arm. "Noah," she said softly, her voice filled with concern. "Why are you looking at her like that? You're scaring me."

Noah snapped out of his daze and turned toward her, his brow furrowing slightly. "I don't know," he replied, his voice strained, his head spinning. "My head, it spins a lot. I can't think of anything. I can't even think straight. It's like there's something I'm trying to remember, but it's just, I don't know."

Mona watched him, a mixture of confusion and concern on her face, but before she could say anything else, Scarlett let out a loud, relieved shout from the water's edge. "The help is here! The help is here!" Her voice rang with excitement. "We're safe, we're safe!"

She glanced at Noah and Mona before dashing toward them, eager to run toward the rescue. But as she approached, she stopped. There, in the

distance, she saw Noah and Mona in a tight embrace, the kind of hug that seemed to speak volumes. Mona had her arms wrapped around Noah, holding him close, and Scarlett couldn't help but feel a pang in her chest. She remembered the way Noah used to hug her, how everything felt so right back then.

Scarlett stood still, tears forming in her eyes, watching them. She had been so hopeful, but seeing them like this made something inside her hurt. Her breath hitched, but she forced a smile through her tears as she watched the ship on the horizon.

Mona, noticing Scarlett's presence, pulled back from Noah, confusion crossing her face. Noah looked at Scarlett, slightly disoriented. "What did you just say?" he asked, still reeling from the storm in his mind. "Did you say the help is here? Are you sure? Is it. Really happening?"

Scarlett nodded, still trying to process everything, her voice shaky but hopeful. "Yes," she said quietly. "We're going to be okay."

Before

The night passed quietly, but the tension in the air was palpable. Noah slept uncomfortably in the chair beside Scarlett, his body aching from the awkward position, but there was a certain peace in him. He knew Scarlett was safe, at least for now, and that knowledge kept him grounded. His mind often wandered back to the fear he felt, fear not for himself, but for her. If her father found her, he wouldn't hesitate to do something terrible.

Scarlett, on the other hand, slept deeply, unaware of the turmoil that gripped Noah. She was resting, but even in her sleep, a hint of vulnerability lingered around her, and Noah couldn't help but protectively reach out and hold her arm, keeping her close. He couldn't shake the feeling that he had to stay near her, to keep her safe.

The morning came too quickly. A soft cough broke the silence, the sound of the doctor clearing his throat, signaling that it was time to wake up. Scarlett stirred, her eyes fluttering open, and she froze for a moment. The first thing she saw was Noah's hand resting on her arm, the way he was holding her, and her heart raced in confusion. She quickly sat up, her face a mix of shock and embarrassment, realizing how close they had been.

Noah was still groggy, his eyes slow to adjust to the light, but he let out a soft groan as he shifted in the chair. He had been awake for a while, but the comfort of being near Scarlett had kept him from moving.

The doctor smiled awkwardly, trying not to make it more uncomfortable than it already was. "I'm sorry to interrupt," he said, "but it's time for a check-up. You're both doing much better, but I

need to make sure everything's alright before you leave."

Scarlett felt a flush creep up her neck, avoiding the doctor's gaze, her heart still racing from the sudden shock of waking up. But she didn't say anything, she didn't have to. Noah was already there, his presence a quiet reassurance that no matter what happened, he was still here with her.

As the doctor checked Scarlett over, making sure she was recovering well, he glanced between her and Noah with a knowing smile. After a moment, he chuckled softly and shook his head. "Ah, I see," he said, his tone teasing but warm. "I love seeing how teenagers love each other these days. It's not like the shallow, rubbish relationships I see all the time. You two really seem to care about each other." He paused, his smile growing. "Honestly, if you invite me to your wedding, I wouldn't be surprised. I can tell there's something special here."

Noah froze for a moment, unsure how to respond. A warmth spread across his face, his usual confidence slipping away as he found himself shy under the doctor's gaze. He hadn't even

considered the idea of something lasting with Scarlett. But hearing it aloud... it felt almost right. He looked at her quickly, unsure, but something inside him stirred, a quiet hope.

Scarlett, on the other hand, turned bright red at the doctor's words. Her eyes widened in panic, and she quickly shook her head, fumbling for the right words. "No, we're just friends from high school," she said, her voice flustered and unsteady. "We're not thinking about anything like that."

She trailed off, suddenly feeling very self-conscious, her heart pounding in her chest. She was sure she was blushing now, there was no way to hide it.

The doctor just smiled warmly, clearly not convinced by her words but not pushing further. "Well, whatever the case may be, it's nice to see such care between two people," he said, giving them both a knowing smile before turning back to Scarlett's condition.

Noah stood feeling the weight of everything pressing on him. After a moment, he picked up the phone the doctor had lent him and dialed his

father's number. The phone rang for a while before his dad answered.

"Hello, who is it?" "Dad, I'm Noah. Can you pick me up from the hospital?" Aren't you supposed to be with your friend? And it's almost 10. Did you skip school, son? You alright?" His dad's voice grew concerned.

Noah looked over at Scarlett, who was still resting, looking fragile. "She fell, Dad. She's hurt. I just want to make sure she's okay."

His dad didn't sound too convinced. "You're at the hospital with a girl? What happened to her? Is she your girlfriend or something?"

Noah paused. He didn't really know how to answer that. "No, Dad. Just a friend from school. She got hurt. I stayed with her overnight."

There was silence for a moment, then his father sighed. "Alright, I'll come pick you up. But you better explain everything when we get home."

When Noah's father arrived at the hospital, he walked in, looking surprised to see Scarlett there. "So, what's going on, Noah? You with a girl at the hospital?"

Noah's dad raised an eyebrow, glancing between Noah and Scarlett. "Is she your girlfriend? You never mentioned her before."

Noah didn't know how to respond. His dad didn't seem angry, but Noah wasn't sure how to explain. He simply muttered, "No, she's just a friend."

His dad didn't press further, but Noah could tell he wasn't fully convinced. "Alright, we'll talk more when we get home. Let's go."

When Noah and his father finally made it home, Noah couldn't help but feel a little uneasy. His dad had been quiet during the drive, but Noah knew he was still processing everything.

Noah turned to Scarlett, who was standing next to him, looking a little lost in thought. "You can sleep in my room, if you want," he offered gently. "I'll take the couch."

Scarlett hesitated, glancing up at Noah. She wasn't sure, and she didn't want to make things awkward. The idea of sleeping in Noah's room felt too close. She wasn't sure if it was right.

Noah saw the hesitation in her eyes and added, "It's fine, really. You need to rest."

Before she could respond, Noah's father, who had been quietly observing, spoke up. "I don't mean to interrupt, but I don't know your name," he said, giving Scarlett a warm smile. "What's your name, dear?"

Scarlett looked up, a bit embarrassed by the attention, but still gave a soft smile. "I'm Scarlett," she said quietly.

Noah's father nodded approvingly. "Scarlett, that's a beautiful name. And you've got a beautiful face to go with it. No wonder my son is looking after you, even if it's just a small fall. He's a good kid." He smiled at Noah, then looked back at Scarlett. "It's good to see him helping someone out."

Scarlett's cheeks flushed red. She wasn't used to receiving compliments, especially not from someone like Noah's dad, who seemed to see right through her. She gave a small nod and quickly followed Noah upstairs to his room.

When they got to Noah's room, he opened the door for her. "You can rest here," Noah said, looking at her carefully. "I'll be in the living room. You're safe here."

Scarlett nodded, grateful for the kindness, but still unsure about everything. She sat down on the edge of the bed, wrapping her arms around herself. It felt a little too much, but she was too tired to argue.

As Noah left, he closed the door behind him, and she heard him talking to his father downstairs. Scarlett took a deep breath, trying to push away the anxiety. She knew she was safe for now.

Meanwhile, downstairs, Noah's father was sitting across from him, looking at him with that serious, knowing gaze. "Noah," he said quietly, "Tell me the truth. I know you're hiding something. I saw her hands. Bruises. She's been through a lot, hasn't she? And the library story? I'm not buying it. I've been a cop, and now I'm in the military. I can see when someone's in trouble. So, tell me. Who is she? What's really going on?"

Noah shifted uncomfortably, his hands clenched. He didn't want to lie to his dad, but he couldn't tell him everything, not about Scarlett's father, not about the real danger she was in. "I'm telling you the truth, Dad," Noah said, forcing the words out.

“She just fell. From the library stairs. It’s nothing serious, really. She’s just clumsy sometimes.”

His father’s gaze was unrelenting. “Noah, I can tell you’re lying. I can see it in your eyes. That girl is in danger. She’s not clumsy. And you’re not telling me everything. If she’s in trouble, you need to tell me so I can help.”

Noah looked at his dad, swallowing hard. He knew his father could help, he had connections. But if he found out the truth about Scarlett’s father, Noah couldn’t bear to think about what that would mean for her.

“She’s fine, Dad. I promise. Just give her time,” Noah said, his voice tight. “I’ll take care of her.”

His father sighed, shaking his head. “Alright, Noah. But you better not be hiding something that’ll put both of you in danger. I’m trusting you here.”

Noah didn’t say anything more. He just nodded, hoping his dad would let it go. He couldn’t tell him the truth, not yet. Not until he figured out how to protect Scarlett.

A few hours later, it was almost 8 p.m. Noah was lying on the couch, trying to get some rest. His mind kept drifting back to Scarlett. He couldn't stop thinking about her, the way she looked at him, the way she was so strong yet so vulnerable at the same time. He wasn't sure what it was, but something about her made his heart race. It was like he had butterflies every time he thought about her.

He kept wondering if what he was feeling was real, or if it was just because of everything that had happened. She was in danger, she was hurt, and he wanted to protect her. But deep down, he couldn't deny it, he was starting to feel something more for her, something he hadn't expected. But what if it was too soon? Was this love, or just a result of the stress and everything they were going through?

He was still lost in his thoughts when his dad walked into the living room, holding a glass of water. "Here, you look like you could use this," he said, handing it to Noah. "You didn't even nap. What's on your mind?"

Noah took the glass, still not sure what to say. His dad's gaze was sharp, though, like he knew something was off.

Noah paused. "I'm just thinking about stuff," he mumbled. He didn't want to say anything about Scarlett. He didn't want to tell his dad how much he cared for her already, not yet.

His dad, sitting down across from him, didn't press further but could tell something was up. "I get it," he said. "But what's going on? You've got that look on you. You've got something you want to say?"

Noah hesitated for a moment, looking down. He didn't want to admit it, not yet, but he couldn't lie to his dad. He took a deep breath. "I think I might be in love with her," he said quietly. His heart skipped a beat when the words left his mouth. "But is love at first sight a thing? Or am I just caught up in everything that's happening?"

His dad leaned back in the chair, giving Noah a knowing look. "Love is complicated," he said softly. "You'll figure it out. But don't ignore it if it's real. It'll make you feel like everything's possible, you know?"

Noah nodded, still unsure. He glanced over at the stairs, knowing Scarlett was upstairs, probably

lying on his bed. He couldn't stop thinking about her.

In the other room, Scarlett could hear their conversation. She'd been sitting quietly, and when she heard Noah say I think I might be in love with her, her heart skipped. She wasn't sure what to make of it. Part of her wanted to believe it, but another part of her was afraid. Could he really be feeling the same way? Or was he just reacting to everything going on?

But when Noah mentioned love, her heart clenched. She had always pushed people away, especially boys, because of her father, but with Noah, it felt different. She wanted to believe it, but she was also scared. Scared of getting hurt. Scared of what it meant.

She bit her lip, unsure. Maybe I'm just imagining things, she thought, trying to shake the feeling. But when Noah spoke, she couldn't help but feel that maybe there was something real between them.

Noah's dad stood up and patted him on the shoulder. "Look, just don't rush it. You've got time. But if you care about her, don't let anything hold you back."

Noah watched his dad walk out of the room, then looked up toward the stairs again, his thoughts still on Scarlett. His heart was racing, and he couldn't shake the feeling that something was changing. He didn't know what it all meant, but he knew he couldn't ignore it anymore.

After

The ship rocked slightly as it made its way toward the mainland, the steady hum of the engine cutting through the tension in the air. Scarlett, Mona, and Noah were bundled in thick blankets, but it didn't do much to soothe the chaos in their heads.

A couple of officers were waiting as they arrived on board. One of them, a man in his thirties with a stern face, approached Noah first. His eyes

flickered to Noah's uniform and then back to him, pausing for a second.

"You're the pilot?" The officer's voice was low. "What happened? Do you remember?"

Noah blinked, his head still foggy. The events of the crash felt distant, like a dream he couldn't quite catch. "Yeah, I'm the pilot, but I'm not sure what really happened. Everything was a blur."

The officer nodded, jotting something down in his notebook. "Can you tell us what happened to the plane? We're getting conflicting reports."

Another officer, a woman who had been listening from a distance, stepped forward. "Are you okay?" She glanced at Noah's pale face. "You don't look well. Are you hurt?"

Noah's vision blurred a bit, and his head felt like it was splitting open. "I'm fine. Just my head spins a lot. Can I rest for a second? Please?"

The woman looked at him for a moment, her expression softening, before nodding. "Alright. We'll give you some space. Just let us know if you start feeling worse."

He muttered a quick thanks and moved toward the side of the boat, leaning against the railing. Scarlett had turned her head away, staring at the vast, dark ocean.

He closed his eyes for a moment, and that's when he heard Scarlett's soft voice behind him, her words barely rising above the sound of the waves. "Noah, are you okay? You need to see a doctor."

He took in a deep breath. "I think so. Just, a lot to take in."

Scarlett nodded, but she didn't turn to face him. She was staring out at the horizon, her expression unreadable. They didn't need to talk about it right now. Neither of them could process what had happened yet.

The officers finished with Mona and moved toward them. But Noah was still there, standing by the edge of the ship, trying to keep his thoughts from scattering.

When the officer from earlier walked past him again, he gave Noah a long look. "We're heading to the mainland. Once we're there, we'll take you to the station for more questions. You'll get some rest there. Don't worry."

Noah simply nodded, but the last thing on his mind right now was answering more questions. He wasn't sure if he even knew the answers.

All he wanted was for everything to slow down. He was exhausted. He didn't know how long he could keep pretending like everything was fine when he knew, deep down, that nothing was okay.

Four months had passed since the crash. Scarlett had just wrapped up her shift when her phone buzzed. It was an unknown number. She picked it up, curious.

"Hey, Scarlett, it's Mona," came the voice, warm but a little hesitant. "I know this might be random, but I wanted to invite you to our engagement party in two days. I managed to find your number, had to do some digging. Sorry, it took me a while to reach out. Things have been a bit hectic with everything."

Scarlett paused, her heart doing a little flip. Mona's voice pulled her back to the island, to the memories of Noah. "I'll be there," she replied, keeping her tone even, though her mind was racing.

The night of the engagement party, Scarlett stood in front of the mirror, holding the dark red dress against her body. She couldn't help but smile as she remembered how Noah used to say that color looked so good on her. But just as quickly, she pushed that thought away. It wasn't her place to think about him anymore. It wasn't their love, not anymore.

She slipped into the dress, the off-shoulder design showcasing her collarbone, the sparkles catching the light. The dress fit her perfectly, short above her knees. She ran her fingers along the collarbone, remembering how Noah used to trace it with his fingers, and why they got that matching tattoo.

She sighed, trying to shake off the memories. "The love of my life invited me to his engagement party. But it's not our engagement. It's Mona's." She took one last look at herself before heading out, her heart fluttering in a way she couldn't explain.

At the party, Scarlett couldn't shake the feeling of being out of place. Old friends from high school were scattered around, some of them chatting and

laughing. She grabbed a drink and stood off to the side, observing the crowd.

It didn't take long for Liam and Henry to spot her. Liam's eyes widened, his jaw almost dropping. "Wow, is that really Scarlett?" he asked, unable to hide his surprise.

Henry, noticing where Liam was staring, glanced over. "She hasn't changed at all. Still looks like she did back in school, but wow, those eyes. That's definitely her."

Liam shook his head, almost in disbelief. "No way. She's so different now. She didn't even try to make herself look like before. She's stunning." He started to walk toward her, Henry following closely behind.

Scarlett didn't notice them right away. But when she heard footsteps approaching, she turned, startled to see Liam and Henry standing in front of her.

"Scarlett," Liam said, his voice still tinged with surprise, "wow, you've really changed. You look more beautiful than I ever remembered. Your hair, it's so light now." He paused, trying to piece together his thoughts. "And, uh, I can't believe it's really you. We used to mess around in high school, but, hey, we're sorry about that."

Scarlett smiled politely but awkwardly, trying to avoid looking too closely at either of them. “Yeah, it’s been a while,” she said softly. “I’m just here to wish Mona and Noah well. I saved them from the crash, I’m a nurse now.”

Liam and Henry exchanged a quick glance. Henry couldn’t stop staring at the tattoo just above Scarlett’s collarbone. He noted how it matched Noah’s tattoo, the same place, the same shape. And as Liam glanced at Scarlett, he could almost read the unspoken connection between her and Noah.

Henry muttered, “She hasn’t forgotten him, has she?”

Liam, still taken aback, nodded slowly, his gaze following Scarlett as she turned away. “No, she’s still holding on to him.”

Scarlett moved away from the conversation, finding a few old teachers, but her mind kept drifting back to Noah, to the memories that were still too painful to ignore. Liam and Henry stood quietly, watching her leave, the tension between them thick with unsaid words.

Scarlett stood quietly at the back of the room, chatting and smiling with a group of old high school teachers. It was strange. She sipped her welcome drink and tried to act like her heart wasn't all over the place.

Up front, Noah stepped onto the stage with Mona at his side. He tapped the mic gently, clearing his throat. The room hushed.

"Thanks for coming, everyone," he said, voice warm but slightly tight. "It really means a lot that you're here. Some of you already know this story, but I'll say it anyway. I met Mona about four years ago, on a flight. I'm a pilot, and she is a flight attendant. We bumped into each other more than once on long hauls and layovers. Over time, something just clicked."

He paused, glancing down at Mona beside him, who smiled up at him, eyes full of warmth.

"We've been through a lot, work stress, changes, and yeah, that crash," he said, the room falling even more silent. "But we're here now, and we're ready to take the next step. She's going to be my wife, and I feel lucky."

Scarlett's fingers tightened slightly around her glass. She didn't make a face, didn't show

anything. But inside, a quiet ache pulsed through her chest.

Mona stepped forward, kissed Noah's cheek softly, and took the mic from him.

"I just want to say how grateful I am for tonight," Mona said. "To have so many of you here means the world. But before we go on with the celebration, I want to thank someone important. Someone who saved our lives. She's a nurse and a real hero. If she's here tonight. Scarlett, please come up."

Scarlett froze where she stood. She hadn't expected this. Not in front of everyone.

All eyes turned to her. A few gasped softly, others whispered. Slowly, she put her drink down and walked toward the stage. Her heels tapped lightly against the floor, her red dress glinting under the lights.

Noah's eyes followed her every step.

She was wearing that deep, dark red, the kind he always thought looked best on her. It was off-shoulder, and it shimmered slightly every time she

moved. Her hair was curled and loose, resting gently along her back in soft golden waves. He remembered that hair. He remembered how soft it looked, how he used to imagine what it would feel like tangled in his fingers.

And just for a moment, as she stepped up to the mic, he had this powerful urge to reach out, to just feel her again. Her presence hit him like a wave. Something inside him shifted.

Scarlett looked out at the crowd, her voice calm but a little unsure. "I didn't do much. I'm just a nurse. It's my job to be there when people need help. I was lucky to be at the right place at the right time."

She paused, her eyes glancing toward the back of the room. "The real hero was a doctor. He was with us. He didn't make it. But without him, I wouldn't have been able to help at all."

The crowd began to clap gently, but Noah didn't move.

She hadn't changed, and yet, she had. The way she carried herself. The way she spoke. The calm strength in her voice. But that color, that dress, her smile. It all brought something back.

He saw a flash, her laughing beside him on the edge of a broken plane. The way she touched his wrist gently when she was treating his wound. The tattoo on her collarbone. Her voice calling his name when the sky went dark.

He blinked and the room came back into focus. Scarlett was already stepping down from the stage, slipping into the crowd again, quietly disappearing like she always did.

Noah stayed still, his heart pounding in a way it hadn't in years.

Mona leaned over and whispered something in his ear. He smiled, nodded, but he didn't hear her.

His eyes followed Scarlett again, drawn like gravity. Why does it feel like I've already loved her?

Scarlett stood quietly at the back of the room, chatting and smiling with a group of Noah's old high school teachers. It was strange, being here after everything, but she played it cool, polite, soft-spoken, even cheerful when needed. She sipped her welcome drink and tried to act like her heart wasn't all over the place.

Up front, Noah stepped onto the stage with Mona at his side. He tapped the mic gently, clearing his throat. The room hushed.

“Thanks for coming, everyone,” he said, voice warm but slightly tight. “It really means a lot that you’re here. Some of you already know this story, but I’ll say it anyway. I met Mona about four years ago, on a flight. I was the pilot, she was a flight attendant. We bumped into each other more than once on long hauls.

Hours passed, and the music played on in the background. Laughter, dancing, lights, but Noah wasn’t part of it. His eyes kept drifting, searching through the crowd like he was waiting to catch a glimpse of something, or someone.

He finally found Liam near the drinks table, chatting with Henry. “Have you seen Scarlett?” Noah asked, trying to keep his voice even. Liam raised his brows. “Scarlett? Nah, not for a while. Why?” Noah just shook his head. “She just disappeared.”

He left without waiting for a response, weaving through the party again, until something pulled him

to the edge of the garden. Past the trees. Past the lights. Behind the building where it was quiet.

And there she was.

Sitting on a low stone step, heels off beside her, dress wrinkled at the knees, her arms curled around herself. Her head was down, her shoulders barely moving, but he could tell she was crying.

Noah froze. “Scarlett?” His voice was soft.

She looked up quickly, surprised. She blinked and wiped at her face, turning away, like she hadn’t been caught. He stepped closer, crouching down in front of her.

“Hey, what’s going on?” he asked gently, brushing a tear off her cheek without even thinking. His thumb lingered a second too long.

She stared at him. “Why are you here?” I was looking for you.” Her voice cracked. “Why now?” Noah searched her face, his heart racing.

“Because.” He swallowed. “Because I’ve been looking for you for seven years, Scarlett.” She blinked. “What do you want me to say to that?”

Noah opened his mouth, then closed it again. He had no answer.

Scarlett stood up slowly, brushing her hands over her dress.

“You left me,” she said, not accusing, just stating it, like a fact that still hurt. “No message. No call. Nothing. I kept looking for you for years, Noah. I even reached out to people. But eventually, I had to stop. It was ruining me.”

He stayed quiet, standing there like someone who’d been hit and didn’t know how to take the next breath. “That’s why I left,” she went on. “I moved to the UK. Started over. I had to forget you.”

Noah’s voice was barely a whisper now. “Did you?” She looked away. “I tried.” He stepped forward, slower this time, quieter. “Scarlett, I never forgot you. I didn’t know how.”

She gave a dry, broken laugh. “Well, now here we are. Ten years later. And I’m standing at your engagement party.” They both paused.

He looked at her, really looked. Her red dress shimmered under the soft outdoor lights. Her blonde hair was curled gently down her back. He

remembered how soft it used to feel between his fingers, how that deep shade of red always brought out the glow in her eyes. And for a second, all of it came rushing back.

The tattoo on her collarbone. The way she used to laugh at nothing. The way he used to touch her was like she might disappear.

He was about to reach out. Almost, but stopped himself. Too late. Scarlett gave him a soft, sad smile. “Goodbye, Noah.” And then she turned. But Noah didn’t move. Not yet. He just stood there, watching the only girl he ever really loved walk away again.

Before

Later that evening, Noah's father grabbed his keys from the kitchen counter. He glanced over at his son on the couch and Scarlett's empty tea mug on the table. Before heading to the door, he placed a few bills under a coaster and called out casually, "I'm off. There's some cash for dinner. Don't starve yourselves."

Noah was lying on the sofa, flipping through channels without really watching anything. His eyes were heavy, and his mind was somewhere else, still thinking about Scarlett, about everything she might be going through.

He heard soft footsteps. When he looked up, he saw her coming down the stairs.

She was wearing one of his old hoodies and a pair of his loose sweatpants. The sleeves covered most of her hands, and the pants were a bit too long, brushing against the floor.

Noah sat up slowly, his eyes locked on her. She looked shy, nervous even, like she didn't know if it was okay to wear his clothes.

Scarlett looked down at herself. "Sorry," she said softly. "I didn't want to wear my dress anymore."

“Noah shook his head, his voice gentle. “No, it’s fine. I think you look better in them than I do.”

She gave a small smile, still standing by the stairs.

“You can come sit if you want,” he said, patting the space next to him. She walked over and sat down, tucking her legs up under her. For a moment, neither of them spoke.

Noah’s eyes landed on the faint burn mark near her collarbone. It was barely hidden by the hoodie’s collar. His smile slowly faded. “What happened there?” he asked, voice low. Scarlett followed his gaze and froze. She looked away. “It’s nothing.”

Noah didn’t push, but his face showed worry. “Scarlett.”

She let out a breath. “My father got angry,” she whispered. “He said I’ve been staying too long at the library. He thought I was hiding something. He burned me with his cigarette.”

Noah stared at her in shock, not knowing what to say at first. Then he quietly said, “That’s not okay. That’s not something any parent should ever do.”

Scarlett looked down at her hands. "It's normal. I'm used to it." "No," Noah said, shaking his head. "You shouldn't be used to it." The room fell quiet again. There was a lot they both wanted to say, but didn't know how.

Noah looked at her. "You know, my mother died when I was just two years old in a car accident. I didn't remember her, just a picture and stories. My dad raised me on his own."

Noah looked at Scarlett, noticing how tired she was, yet she smiled softly. "I haven't offered you any food since you woke up," he said, his voice a little guilty. "Sorry about that. You hungry?"

Scarlett nodded, feeling the hunger settle in her stomach. "But I can't cook anything. I don't know where anything is," feeling embarrassed.

Noah smiled, trying to ease her worry. "Don't worry about it. We'll order. What are you in the mood for? Pizza? Burgers?"

Scarlett shrugged, still a little lost in her thoughts. "Anything, really. I'm so hungry." Noah quickly grabbed his phone and ordered some food. "Alright, while we wait, how about a walk? There's

a lake nearby. It's dark, but it's nice out, and we can talk. It's not far."

Scarlett thought about it for a moment. She needed to stretch her legs. "Yeah, a walk sounds good," she said, standing up.

As they reached the lake, Noah sat beside her, his hand gently holding hers, not saying much. He didn't know the right words to make everything better, but he wasn't going anywhere. He just wanted her to know that.

"Scarlett," Noah's voice was soft, like he was still figuring out how to even say this. "I don't even know how to say this I can't believe you've been through all of that." He squeezed her hand. "I'm so sorry."

She didn't look at him at first, keeping her gaze on the floor, her fingers wrapped tightly around his. It was like she was holding herself together. "You didn't know," she said quietly, almost like an apology, like it wasn't his fault. "I never talked about it. I just kept it to myself. I didn't want anyone to know."

Noah's heart broke just hearing that. He felt his chest tighten, but he didn't know what to say. He

could barely comprehend how someone could go through that, let alone alone.

“I can’t even imagine what that must’ve been like,” he said, his voice barely above a whisper. “I’m just so sorry. You didn’t deserve any of that.”

Scarlett swallowed hard, and for a second, Noah thought she might break, but she stayed quiet. It was like her whole world had shifted, and she wasn’t sure where to stand anymore. “My dad,” she said, her voice cracking. “He wasn’t always like that. I remember when he used to be good. Before he, my mom.” She cut herself off. The words seemed too heavy to say.

Noah didn’t even know what to say. The silence between them felt thick, almost too heavy to breathe through. “I don’t know how someone could hurt their kid like that,” he finally said, the anger creeping into his voice. “But you didn’t deserve it, Scarlett. You didn’t.”

She looked up at him then, her eyes glistening. “I just wanted to be safe, Noah,” she whispered, almost like she was talking to herself. “I wanted to know someone would protect me.”

Noah could feel the weight of her words sink into his chest. He leaned closer, making sure she knew he was there. He placed his hand on her shoulder, guiding her closer, but not in a way that felt rushed. Just a slow, steady movement.

“You’re safe now,” he said, his voice firm but full of warmth. “I don’t care what happens, I’m not going anywhere. Not ever. You won’t have to go through this alone anymore.”

Scarlett didn’t say anything at first. She just let him hold her, the warmth of his presence slowly washing over her. For the first time in a long while, she felt like maybe, just maybe, things could be okay. She wasn’t alone.

And then, without even thinking about it, her head just slid onto his shoulder. It felt good. She was tired. She hadn’t realized how exhausted she was until now. All those years, she’d been carrying so much, and finally, for once, she could rest.

Noah stayed still, letting her find comfort in him. He didn’t speak for a while. He didn’t need to. He just sat there, knowing she wasn’t alone anymore. Knowing that this moment, however small, was something real. Something that meant more than words.

“I’ve never felt this safe,” Scarlett whispered after a while, her voice barely above a breath. “Not in so long.”

Noah looked down at her, his heart swelling. He wasn’t going anywhere. She didn’t have to worry about being alone anymore. He was right there. Always.

Minutes passed, the air cool against their skin as they sat by the lake, the sounds of nature surrounding them. Scarlett’s head rested on Noah’s shoulder, the silence between them comfortable, soothing. Noah’s hand gently moved through her hair, fingers brushing against the soft strands. He couldn’t help but be mesmerized by how smooth and light it felt, like he could get lost in it.

The world felt still, like nothing else mattered except for this moment. He wasn’t thinking about the future or what had happened in the past, just Scarlett, here beside him. Her presence was calming, and he couldn’t remember the last time he felt so at peace.

Noah's phone buzzed, the vibration pulling him out of the moment. He glanced down and saw the delivery guy's number.

"Pizza's here," he said with a small smile, making Scarlett sit up a little, a soft smile appearing on her face.

"Perfect timing," she replied, her voice a little lighter, almost excited. "I was starving."

Noah stood up and went to get the pizza, and when he came back, Scarlett was looking out over the lake. There was a change in her expression now, something more relaxed, the weight of everything from before seemingly lifting. They were just two people, enjoying a quiet evening by the water.

They ate beside the lake, the evening air cool and fresh around them. Noah laughed as he wiped his hands on his jeans after taking a bite.

"Tomorrow we're going to have to come up with some good excuse for missing school," he said, shaking his head. "Mr. Franklin is going to have a fit when he sees we skipped the quiz."

Scarlett shrugged. "We can just say we were in the hospital all day, right? He's gotta understand that."

Noah laughed, nodding. "Maybe, but we should probably keep it simple. Something about studying and stuff."

They both chuckled, the tension from earlier now gone. As they finished their pizza, they leaned back, the quiet stretching out between them.

Noah glanced over at Scarlett, the soft light from the evening sky catching her face. He couldn't help but notice her.

She caught him staring and gave him a small smile, as if sensing the thought that crossed his mind. "Tomorrow's gonna be interesting," Scarlett said, breaking the quiet.

Noah held Scarlett's hand as they got up after finishing their pizza. "We have to get back inside. It's getting chilly out here."

As they walked back to the house, Scarlett felt a little more tired, and the cool evening air had made her feel sleepy. She didn't want to admit it to Noah. She didn't want to seem weak. She kept up with him, walking slowly but enjoying the quiet of the night, the sounds of their footsteps echoing on the pavement.

When they finally got inside, Scarlett felt a wave of exhaustion hit her. She just wanted to rest, but she couldn't say it. She didn't want to leave Noah just yet.

They settled on the couch, both of them still talking, laughing about silly things. It felt good, almost like a normal night between two friends. Noah put on a movie, and they sat together, still chatting during the quiet parts of the film. But as the movie went on, Scarlett's eyelids grew heavier. She fought it at first, not wanting to seem like she was giving in to the sleepiness, but eventually, she just couldn't keep her eyes open.

Without a word, she curled up on the couch, resting her head against the armrest, and drifted off to sleep.

Noah didn't notice at first, too focused on the screen, but when the movie ended, he turned to her. He smiled softly, watching her sleeping face, peaceful and calm, like everything that had happened was far behind her.

She looked so beautiful, even though she'd been through so much. His heart tightened as he thought about how unfair it was that someone like

her, someone so full of light and kindness, had to go through what she had. She didn't deserve any of it.

Not wanting to wake her, he gently leaned over and brushed a strand of hair from her face. He hesitated for a moment, then decided he couldn't just let her sleep on the couch. Carefully, he scooped her up in his arms, being as gentle as possible. She barely stirred, wrapped up in the comfort of sleep.

He went to his room, trying to be quiet so he wouldn't disturb her. He laid her down on his bed, tucking her in gently. He just stood there for a moment, looking at her, his heart full of something he couldn't quite name. It wasn't love, not yet, but it was something strong, something real.

He moved away from her, but he couldn't bring himself to sleep far from her. He grabbed a couple of blankets and made a makeshift bed on the floor beside her, lying there in the dark. He wanted to be close, close enough to feel her presence, even if they weren't in the same bed.

After

Noah tried to catch Scarlett before she walked to her car. "Scarlett, please." Noah took another step closer, his hand still lightly holding her arm. His voice lowered, softer. "I know I left you without a word, but you have to believe me, it wasn't because I stopped caring. I never did."

Scarlett blinked, her eyes glassy but unreadable. "Then why, Noah? Why didn't you come back? Why didn't you look for me?"

He swallowed hard. "Because your father. He threatened me, Scarlett. The night I came to your house, he pulled me aside and told me if I ever contacted you again, he'd kill you."

Scarlett's face didn't change, but her shoulders stiffened.

“He told me you were his daughter, not mine to save,” Noah said, his voice shaking. “He said, ‘You think you’re a hero? You’re not. If you ever talk to her again, she’s gone. I killed her mother. Don’t think I won’t do the same to her.’”

Noah looked at her with quiet desperation. “I believed him. I was scared, Scarlett. I didn’t know what to do. I begged my dad to help, to take you with us when we left, but he said it was too dangerous. I thought, if I just disappeared, maybe your father would stop watching you. Maybe you’d be safer without me.”

She spoke. “It’s too late for that now, Noah. You’re engaged, and I’m nothing to you anymore. You don’t love me anymore.”

Noah shook his head, reaching for her again, but she stepped back. “I’m sorry, Scarlett. You don’t know how much I’ve thought about you, how much I’ve wanted to come back, to fix this. I never stopped thinking about you.”

Scarlett let out a shaky breath, wiping away her tears. “But you’ve moved on. You have someone else now.”

Noah gazed with regret. “I never stopped loving you. I never will.”

But Scarlett shook her head, her voice almost a whisper now, “I gave up waiting for you, Noah. And now, it’s too late. You can’t undo what’s been done.”

With that, she opened the car door and slid inside, starting the engine before he could say another word. Noah stood there, watching her drive away, his heart breaking, knowing that, no matter what he said now, the distance between them had grown too wide to cross.

Noah stood there, staring after Scarlett’s car as it slowly disappeared down the road. The sound of her engine faded, but the feeling in his chest only grew heavier. His body felt frozen, as though he couldn’t move even if he tried. He wanted to chase after her, to make her stop, but all he could do was watch as she drove farther and farther away.

His mind kept replaying their conversation over and over. The words she’d said, so much hurt, so much anger, and it hit him like a punch to the gut. How could he have let her go like that? How could he have broken all the promises he made to her? He should’ve tried harder. He should’ve fought for her.

But no. He listened to her father. He listened to the threats. And it was easier to walk away, to pretend that he wasn't losing her. But now, here he was, standing alone in the dark, realizing that he might've lost her forever.

A soft hand touched his shoulder, pulling him from his thoughts. It was Mona. She was standing next to him, her voice full of concern, but Noah barely heard her. He couldn't focus on anything else.

"I've been looking everywhere for you," Mona said, her tone excited, but Noah was still lost in his own mind. He turned to look at her, but it wasn't her face he saw. It was Scarlett's.

Mona didn't seem to notice his distant stare, her energy still high as she talked about everything they needed to do next. But Noah didn't hear her. He couldn't hear anything except the sound of Scarlett's car fading away and the weight of all his regret.

When they got back to the house, Mona was still chatting about their engagement, about the future, but Noah could hardly even pretend to listen. All he

could think about was Scarlett, how she'd looked when she drove away, how broken she seemed.

He dropped down onto the couch, feeling like he had no energy left. "I'm just going to sleep here tonight," he said, his voice dull, barely even meeting Mona's eyes. "I'm exhausted."

Mona blinked, surprised. "But our bed is so comfortable. You'll sleep so much better there."

"I just need to be alone," Noah said, his tone quiet but firm. He didn't want to explain it to her. He didn't even know how to explain it. The weight of everything he'd been carrying for the last ten years was too much to bear in front of her.

Mona didn't argue. She just nodded, and with a quick smile, she left him there, curled up on the couch. Noah let his eyes fall closed, but sleep wouldn't come. He could only think of Scarlett, and how he might've ruined any chance of being with her again.

Before

The morning light filtered through the curtains, and Scarlett slowly stirred, blinking her eyes open. She stretched her arms above her head, feeling the cool air of the room. She glanced over at Noah, who was still sound asleep on the floor, curled up

under a blanket, his chest rising and falling steadily.

She smiled softly, but then remembered they had things to do.

“Come on, Noah,” she whispered as she got up from the bed, walking over to him and giving him a gentle nudge. “Wake up.”

Noah groaned, shifting a little but not fully waking up.

“Hey,” Scarlett said, a little louder now, “We have to talk to Mr. Franklin today. We need to give him an excuse to redo that quiz, remember? I know it’s early, but we can’t skip it.”

She leaned down, tapping him lightly on the shoulder. “Noah, come on, we need to get going,” she said, trying to make her voice firm, though she couldn’t help but smile at how stubborn he was about mornings. “We can still make breakfast before school. You can’t stay here all day.”

Scarlett was finishing up breakfast when the front door opened with a soft creak. Noah’s dad stepped in, still wearing his work clothes, clearly just back

from a night shift. He froze for a second when he saw Noah already up and moving around.

Noah stood near the counter, hair messy, still rubbing sleep from his eyes and trying to look more awake than he felt.

His dad raised an eyebrow, then let out a short laugh. "Well, this is new. You're awake on time?" Then his eyes moved to Scarlett, who was standing by the stove. A knowing smile spread across his face.

"Ah," he said, teasing, "now I get it. Scarlett's here. That explains it." He grinned. "Please, Scarlett, feel free to come every morning if it means this one actually gets out of bed." Noah groaned and gave his dad a look. "Really? You're going to start already?" Scarlett laughed softly, a little shy. "I just woke him up, that's all," she said. "Nothing special."

His dad chuckled, walking toward the coffee pot. "Trust me, that's already more than I can usually manage." He glanced back at Noah. "Maybe I should let you handle him from now on."

His dad poured himself some coffee. “Scarlett, seriously, thank you. If he keeps this up, I owe you a lot.”

As they were finishing breakfast, Noah’s dad stood up. “I’m gonna head upstairs and get ready. I’m meeting some friends later. You two eat, and don’t be late for school.”

Noah turned to Scarlett, then froze when he realized she was still wearing his hoodie. His eyebrows furrowed as he looked at her. “You wanna change or are you planning on going to school like that?” he asked,

Scarlett’s cheeks turned bright red, and she shifted uncomfortably. She couldn’t go back home to change, and that thought made her uneasy. Noah noticed her unease and softened. “Hey, don’t worry about it,” he said gently. “We still have some of my mom’s clothes around. They’re up in the attic. I can get you something.”

Scarlett nodded. Noah led her upstairs to the attic, where old boxes and forgotten memories filled the space. He sifted through them, pushing aside some old things, until he found a few dresses his mom had left behind when she passed away.

Noah pulled out three of them, unsure at first, but then his gaze fell on one in particular, a dark red dress that he thought would suit her perfectly.

“Here,” he said, handing it to her. “I think this one will look great on you.”

Scarlett took the dress from him and changed in the attic, the fabric fitting her beautifully. When she came down, Noah was taken aback by how stunning she looked. The dark red dress hugged her perfectly, and the way it contrasted with her hair made her look even more striking than he could’ve imagined.

Noah stared at her for a long moment, caught off guard by how breathtaking she looked. “Wow,” he muttered, almost to himself. “You look amazing. I mean, I knew it would look good, but not like this.”

Scarlett smiled softly, clearly a little shy under his gaze. “Thank you,” she said, glancing at herself in the mirror.

Noah shook himself out of his daze and cleared his throat. “We should probably get going,” he said quietly. “We don’t want to be late.” While kissing her on the cheek.

Noah dialed Henry's number on his phone. "Hey, Henry," Noah said when his friend picked up. "Look, my car's not here anymore. Could you come pick me up? I need to get to school."

"No worries, man. I'll be there. Just give me 30 minutes to get dressed and ready."

Noah stood outside, waiting for Henry to pull up. Scarlett was beside him, quiet but close, her fingers gently holding onto his.

A few minutes later, Henry's car rolled into the driveway. Noah grabbed his and Scarlett's bags.

As soon as Henry saw Scarlett with him, his mouth dropped open. He blinked a few times, leaning forward from the driver's seat like he wasn't sure what he was seeing.

"Wait, am I still dreaming?" Henry said, eyes wide. "Is that a girl next to you? Like, your girl?" He stared at Scarlett. "No way. Liam told me he saw you with Scarlett at the hospital, but I wasn't expecting it. I thought he was joking."

Noah gave him a small shrug, trying not to smile too much. "Yeah, she's my girlfriend," he said calmly.

Scarlett blushed and leaned into Noah's side, hugging his arm softly. Her voice was quiet when she asked, "Are we really, officially together?"

Noah looked down at her and smiled. "Yeah. I think we are."

Henry laughed, still stunned. "Man, okay. Get in, lovebirds. We're gonna be late."

They got in the car, Scarlett sitting between them in the front seat. On the way to school, Henry kept glancing over, shaking his head like he still couldn't believe it.

When they arrived at school, everything felt different. As soon as Noah and Scarlett walked through the gates, hand in hand, people stopped and stared. Whispers spread fast. A few students pointed. Some just stared like they'd seen something they never expected.

Scarlett lowered her head a little, clearly shy under the sudden attention. Noah leaned close and whispered, "Ignore them. It's just a surprise for them. They'll get used to it."

She gave a small smile and nodded, staying close to him.

When Scarlett entered the classroom, the teacher wasn't there yet, and Leah was the first to notice her. She gasped, eyes widening as she took in Scarlett's dress. "Wow, you look amazing! So, you're with Noah now? Is that real? I can't believe it. It just doesn't add up. He's such a big bully, and you're so sweet. I don't get how you two could be together."

Scarlett laughed, shrugging. "Yeah, things turned around, and we're together now. Please, don't ask me how or when. Just leave it, alright?" she said.

Leah couldn't help but smile back, but she still seemed a bit skeptical. "Okay, I won't ask. But I still don't understand how that happened."

Before they could chat more, the math teacher walked in, and class started. Scarlett wasn't really paying attention, though, her mind wandering to Noah. She could feel his thoughts on her, too. And she smiled softly to herself. When the bell rang, signaling the end of class, Scarlett gathered her things, only to look up and see Noah standing outside, waiting for her with a big smile.

He walked toward her, and they exchanged a smile before Noah leaned in, just as Scarlett was

about to hug him. "I miss you," he said softly, though there was a teasing look in his eyes.

Scarlett shrugged with a playful smile

When the bell rang for lunch, Noah stood outside her classroom, waiting for her. They shared a soft, gentle hug, but before they could head off, Leah's voice dropped to a serious tone.

"Don't hurt my friend, Noah," she said, looking him dead in the eye. "Don't lie to her, just tell me. If you ever hurt her, I swear, I'll hurt you." Her voice was calm but deadly serious. "She's my best friend, Noah. Don't mess with her."

Noah nodded, his eyes softening. "I won't hurt her, I promise."

Then, they made their way to the lunchroom, and while Liam and Henry went off to grab something, Noah stayed by Scarlett's side. As they sat, Noah's gaze fell on the mark on Scarlett's collarbone, his thoughts drifting back to something he'd been thinking about for a while.

"You know," he began, his voice a little quieter, "we should get matching tattoos, something that

reminds us of this moment. Maybe something for that burn your father did.”

Scarlett looked at him, surprised by the suggestion. “What kind of tattoo?” she asked. Noah shrugged. “How about an infinity symbol? I think it fits us, something that lasts forever. Liam’s father is a tattoo artist.” Scarlett smiled warmly at him.

Months had passed. The snow kept falling outside, but inside, the warmth of the room made everything feel cozy. Scarlett and Noah were sitting close together on the couch, just enjoying each other’s company. The movie played quietly, but they were more focused on each other than on the screen.

Noah stood up to bring his phone upstairs from his room. Scarlett stayed behind, still holding her cup of tea, when the doorbell rang.

“I’ll get it. It’s probably your dad, just getting home from his shift,” she said.

When she opened it, she didn’t expect to see her father standing there with two of his friends. The moment she saw them, her stomach twisted.

Before she could even react, her father and his friends pushed their way inside. They grabbed her, pulling her toward the door.

“No! Let me go!” Scarlett screamed, trying to break free. “Noah!” she yelled, hoping he’d hear her, but Noah was already rushing toward her.

When he saw her father, all the anger and fear built up in him. His heart raced, but he wasn’t backing down.

“What do you want from her?” Noah shouted, his fists clenched. Scarlett’s dad glared at him, almost laughing. “She’s my daughter. Why are you trying to take her from me?” he asked, voice dripping with bitterness.

Noah couldn’t hold back. “You left her!” he shot back with rage. “When the car crashed, I begged you to take her to the hospital, but you didn’t care! You just walked away. And now, you show up here like you can just take her back after everything you’ve done to her?”

Her father smirked, his face hard as stone. “I don’t care what you think. I’m her father. I can leave her, and I can take her back whenever I want,” he said coldly.

Noah felt his blood boil, but Scarlett’s dad wasn’t done. With a quick movement, he pulled out a gun and pointed it straight at Noah.

Scarlett froze. She couldn't breathe. "Noah!" she screamed, but it felt like the world had stopped moving. Her dad sneered at Noah. "You think you can protect her? You're just a kid. "Noah didn't care. He wasn't afraid. He ran at her dad, ready to fight for Scarlett. But before he could get any closer, the gun went off.

The shot echoed in the room, loud and terrifying. Scarlett screamed, her heart stopping as she saw Noah hit the ground. She couldn't move. She just stared at him, her mind screaming for him to get up, for this not to be real.

"Noah!" she cried, but it was like the world had gone quiet.

Her father didn't flinch. He just looked at her, pulling her away from the scene. "I told you, Scarlett, you're mine. You don't need anyone but me. He's just a kid, and I can do whatever I want."

Scarlett couldn't focus on his words. She was trying to look at Noah one last time, but her father wouldn't let her. He dragged her out the door, her body trembling with fear, and she couldn't stop crying.

“No, please! Let me go to him!” Scarlett begged, but her father didn’t listen. He kept pulling her away.

She turned back one last time, but Noah was still on the floor, unmoving. The blood was all she could see. Her heart shattered as the door slammed behind her.

After

Noah lay on the sofa, staring at the ceiling, the rain tapping against the windows. The storm outside was violent, as if the sky itself was angry. He couldn’t sleep. Not tonight. His mind kept drifting back to Scarlett and how she just walked away from him again. She left, just like last time. He had to fix this.

He rolled over, trying to get comfortable, but sleep wasn’t coming. The rain kept him awake, the sound of it hammering against the roof like it was trying to drown out everything else. He just kept

thinking about her, about how she was probably out there, alone, with no one to talk to, and how he let her slip away. Again.

Noah sat up suddenly, frustration burning through him. He couldn't just lie there. Not with this feeling, not with everything still hanging in the air between them.

He grabbed Mona's phone from the coffee table. He knew she had Scarlett's number; she was the one who invited her to their engagement party. He opened her contacts and found the number. For a second, his fingers hovered over the screen, and then, without thinking, he saved it. He didn't even know what he was doing, he just needed to hear her voice.

The storm outside had gotten worse. The wind howled, and the rain came down harder, but Noah didn't care. He dialed Scarlett's number. His heart was beating way too fast, his palms sweaty as he waited. It rang for a few seconds, then he heard her voice. It was soft, shaky. She sounded like she'd been crying.

"Hello?" she said

“Scarlett, please,” Noah’s voice broke, the words tumbling out in a rush. “Why did you leave? I was trying to explain. Please, I’m begging you. Just one more chance. I’ll explain everything. Just one more chance, please.”

There was a long pause, the only sound the rain pounding against the window. Scarlett’s voice came back, quieter, almost defeated. “Noah, I’m in my apartment. I’ll send you the address, but please the weather is bad. Don’t drive out here in this storm. You should come tomorrow morning.”

Noah’s hands gripped the phone tightly, but he didn’t hesitate. “No. I’m coming now. I don’t care about the weather. I need to see you.”

He could hear her sigh, and then her message popped up on his phone. “Please be safe. The weather is really bad. But I’ll give you one more chance to explain. Just please don’t drive too fast.”

Noah didn’t even think twice. He grabbed his keys, ran out the door, and into the downpour. The rain slapped at his face, the wind cutting through him like a blade. It was hard to even walk through

it, but he didn't care. He had to go. He had to fix things with her.

When he got to his car, he paused for a moment, staring at the windshield wipers barely keeping up with the rain. The streets were empty, nothing but the storm outside. But that didn't matter. Nothing mattered but getting to Scarlett.

He threw the car into gear, his hands shaking as he gripped the wheel. The road was barely visible through the rain, but he kept going, every minute feeling like an eternity. He kept glancing at his phone, seeing the message from Scarlett, "Please be careful."

But Noah couldn't slow down. Not when he was so close to fixing everything. So close to her.

Noah's grip on the steering wheel tightened as he pushed the car faster, the rain making it almost impossible to see. The windshield wipers could barely keep up with the downpour, but he didn't care. Every second mattered. He needed to get to Scarlett, to explain himself, to fix this.

The road was dangerous. The lights from the streetlamps barely cut through the thick, black night. He took a sharp turn a little too quickly, the tires screeching against the wet pavement. For a

second, he felt the car slide, his heart leaping into his throat. His foot slammed down harder on the brake, just narrowly avoiding a large tree on the side of the road. The car swerved back into its lane, but the scare only pushed him harder.

Noah didn't slow down. He couldn't. Every second he wasted felt like an eternity, and his mind wouldn't let him forget the image of Scarlett walking away from him. The pain of her leaving, and now he had the chance to fix it. To make her stay.

Finally, after what felt like an endless drive, he pulled up to the building where Scarlett was staying. The rain was still coming down in sheets, but Noah barely noticed as he grabbed his phone and called her.

Her voice came through the phone, tired but still holding that familiar softness. "Hello?" "Scarlett," Noah's voice was urgent, out of breath. "What's your room number?" "209, second floor," she replied quietly. "Noah, are you sure you should be out here? The storm."

But Noah didn't wait for her to finish. He didn't have time for anything else. He hung up, slammed

the car door shut, and made a beeline for the building. The stairs were the fastest way up, and he wasn't about to waste a single second waiting for the elevator. His footsteps pounded against the cold, slick stairs as he rushed up, feeling like his lungs were on fire but pushing through it anyway.

Each step felt like it took longer than the last. He could barely focus on anything except getting to her, getting to the one person who could make everything right. When he finally reached the second floor, his heart was pounding in his chest, his legs shaky from the climb. But he didn't stop. He took a deep breath, wiped the rain from his face, and stood in front of her door.

He knocked, the sound almost drowned out by the storm outside, but he didn't care. He just needed to see her. He couldn't let her leave. Not without telling her how sorry he was.

The door creaked open, and Scarlett stood there, eyes wide. Her gaze flickered down to Noah, his clothes soaked through, dripping water onto the floor. He was breathing heavily, his hair sticking to his forehead, and he looked like he had just walked out of a storm.

For a second, neither of them said anything. Scarlett's face fell, and Noah saw the sadness in her eyes, the way her how much she was hurting. And it was all his fault.

"I'm sorry," Noah breathed, stepping forward. "I had to see you. I couldn't leave things like this. I know I messed up. Please, let me explain."

Scarlett didn't move. She just stared at him, her heart breaking at the sight of him standing there. She opened her mouth to say something, but no words came out.

Noah's hand shook as he reached up, gently touching the door frame. "Scarlett, please. Don't let me lose you." Her eyes welled up with tears, and she stepped back, letting the door open fully. "You shouldn't have come," she whispered, barely audible. "Look at you. You're soaked. Why do you even care? After everything, after all the mistakes you made, after you left me."

Noah didn't wait for her to finish. He stepped into the apartment, his heart in his throat. "I don't care about anything else. I just want you to stay. I'll do whatever it takes. Just, don't leave me again."

Scarlett looked at him, her face full of sorrow, and then closed her eyes as if to brace herself for the pain. She knew the choice she had to make, and it felt heavier than ever. But at that moment, Noah didn't care about anything except her. He wasn't going anywhere.

Noah stepped into Scarlett's apartment, water dripping from his clothes, his shoes squeaking on the wooden floor. The cold from the storm seeped into his bones, but he barely noticed it. He was too focused on her, on finally being in the same place after everything that had happened.

Scarlett stood there for a moment, just watching him. She didn't speak at first, just looked at him, soaked to the bone, looking like he had just walked. She shook her head lightly, then moved quickly to grab a towel from the bathroom.

"You're crazy, Noah," she said softly, tossing him the towel. "Here, dry off. You're going to catch a cold."

Noah caught the towel and smiled faintly, grateful for her care. He wiped his face, his hair dripping wet. "I couldn't wait any longer. I needed to see you."

Scarlett disappeared into the small closet and came back with an old pair of pajamas, ones she knew had been his. “I hope these fit. I never got rid of them.” Noah looked at the clothes in her hands, surprised. “You kept them?” She nodded, her voice barely above a whisper. “Yeah. I didn’t throw them away. I used to wear them when I stayed at your house when we were younger.”

Noah felt a pang in his chest. All these years, she had held on to those memories. It made him feel something, something deep he hadn’t expected. She really hadn’t forgotten.

“Thank you,” Noah said softly, taking the clothes from her. He stepped into the bathroom to change. The pajamas were too tight, and the top was a bit short on him, but it didn’t matter. It felt like a piece of the past, and for a moment, he could almost feel the warmth of those days again.

When he came out, Scarlett was sitting on the sofa, her eyes on him. He sat beside her, but there was a distance between them, not physically, but emotionally. The space was there, thick and heavy with all the things they hadn’t said yet.

Noah took her hands in his, feeling the warmth of her skin against his cold, wet fingers. He looked at

her, really looked at her, taking in the sight of her in front of him. He had missed her so much, more than he ever realized.

“Scarlett,” he began, his voice shaky but firm, “I need to explain everything. Please, don’t interrupt me. Just let me get it all out.”

She didn’t say anything, just nodded slowly, her eyes searching his face. She wasn’t sure what to expect, but she could see the sincerity in his eyes. She waited.

Noah took a deep breath. “I never meant to hurt you. I know I did, and I know I left without saying anything. I thought I was doing the right thing by keeping my distance, by protecting you from my mess. But it wasn’t right. I was so scared that I would drag you down with me. That you’d be hurt because of me. I thought if I disappeared, it would be better for you.”

He looked at her then, his chest tight, but he didn’t look away. “But I was wrong. I should have fought harder. I should have been there for you. I should have told you what happened, why I left. But I was a coward. And I know you probably hate me for that.

Scarlett just stared at him, not saying anything, but Noah could feel the weight of her gaze. He continued, his voice barely above a whisper.

“I regret it every single day. I regret not being honest with you. And I know I can’t undo what I’ve done, but please, I need you to understand. I never wanted to hurt you. I thought I was protecting you. And now, here I am, asking you for one more chance. Just one. So I can make it right, Scarlett. So I can show you that I’m not the person I was back then.”

The room was quiet except for the soft hum of the rain outside. Scarlett didn’t speak right away, and Noah’s heart started to race, his nerves getting the best of him.

“I know I can’t fix everything,” he added quickly. “But I want to try. Please. Just let me show you I can do better. Let me make up for the past.

He squeezed her hands tighter, looking at her with desperation in his eyes, waiting for her response.

Scarlett nodded slowly, her eyes flicking away from his, as if she was trying to gather her thoughts. She let out a long sigh before speaking,

her voice soft, almost trembling. “You know, the last time I saw you, I thought, I thought you were dead,” she whispered, her eyes distant. “You were on the ground, and your father was holding that gun to you. I thought I lost you, Noah. I thought it was over. I was so scared.”

Noah quickly cut her off, shaking his head as if he could erase that moment, the fear she must’ve felt. “No, Scarlett. I wasn’t dead. I know you thought I was, but I wasn’t. I know that’s why you’re mad at me, why you hate me, but please listen. I wasn’t dead. I was hurt, but I wasn’t dead.”

He took a deep breath, his eyes locking onto hers, trying to convey everything he was feeling without words. “After your father, after he shot me, my dad found me. He saw me lying on the floor, blood coming out of me, but I wasn’t dead. My dad rushed me to the hospital. I was in there for two weeks because of what your father did to me. But I couldn’t tell you any of this. I couldn’t tell you because I knew your father had ways to control you. He’s dangerous, Scarlett. And even if he was in jail, his people still had eyes on you.”

Noah swallowed hard, his throat dry. He reached into his pocket, pulling out his wallet. He fumbled for a moment, thankful that it hadn’t gotten soaked

in the rain, then pulled out a slightly crumpled letter. The paper was a little damp from the storm, but he handed it to her.

“This letter,” he said, his voice thick with emotion. “I wrote this nine years ago. After I graduated from high school. I wanted to send it to you so badly. I wanted you to know everything, I wanted to tell you how I felt, how I was always thinking about you. But I couldn’t send it. Your father was everywhere. I was afraid. I was afraid of him, Scarlett. He said, he said that if I ever came near you again, he’d kill you. He said he’d do it in front of me. And I was terrified.”

Noah’s voice cracked a little as he continued, his eyes searching hers, desperate for her to understand. “I wanted to save you, Scarlett. I really did. I wanted to stay. I wanted to fight for us. But I couldn’t. I had to leave, I had to keep my distance, hoping that you’d be safe, that you’d be okay. And even though I left, I never stopped thinking about you. I never stopped wondering if you were alive, if you were okay.”

He paused, then added, “I had my friends look out for you. They kept an eye on you, just to make

sure you were safe. And when I heard your father was in jail, when I found out you were free, I was relieved. I knew you were alone, but at least you weren't in danger anymore. And that was the most important thing to me, Scarlett. You being safe."

Noah wiped his face with his hand, trying to steady himself before continuing. "And I know this doesn't fix anything. I can't go back and undo what happened. I can't change the past. But please forgive me. I've carried this with me all these years, and I'm so sorry I never gave you that letter. I was just so afraid. But now, I'm here, and I want to be with you, Scarlett. I need you to understand why I did what I did, even if it wasn't the right choice."

His eyes glistened as he looked at her. He wasn't asking her to forgive him right away. He wasn't even sure if she could. But he had to try.

"I can't lose you again," he added, his voice barely above a whisper. "I'm sorry. I was wrong, but I'm here now. Please let me make it right."

Scarlett carefully unfolded the old paper, her fingers trembling as she held it. She was afraid it might tear, the paper so worn from age and the

water that had seeped through. Her heart pounded in her chest as she read Noah's words, the ones he wrote all those years ago. She felt the weight of every sentence, each word carrying a history, a promise, a regret.

Hello, it's me. Noha, I don't know why I felt like I was talking to an audience hahaha, but anyway, you may hate me by now. No, you hate me, Scarlett, I'm sure about that, for leaving you without even saying goodbye, and I hope you're happy in your life, away from your father. I will never forget our time we spent together, our love, our laughter, and every memory. Thank you for making me, for the first time, feel what real love means.

Noah.

When she finished, she slowly set the paper down, her eyes still on the words, trying to take everything in. She didn't look at Noah at first, unsure of what to say. The silence in the room was deafening. She glanced up, meeting his gaze. The truth was sinking in, and with it, the fear that had been building up inside her. "But, what about Mona?" she asked softly, the words heavy with concern. "You can't just leave her like you left me. I won't let that happen."

Noah sighed, running a hand through his wet hair. His voice was calm, but there was a rawness to it that Scarlett hadn't expected. "Mona knows. She knows everything," he said, his eyes fixed on her. "I told her everything, but I didn't mention your name. She doesn't know who you are, Scarlett. I didn't want her to know that part of me. I didn't want her to be a part of this, not until I knew for sure what I wanted."

He paused for a moment, his gaze drifting away, as though he was still processing his thoughts. "Mona told me that if I ever found you. She'd understand. She said she didn't think you'd want

me back, that you'd moved on. She was right in a way, but, I can't pretend like it doesn't matter. I can't just walk away from you again. Not now."

Scarlett swallowed, her emotions swirling inside her. "So, what now?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Noah shook his head. "I don't know," he admitted, his voice thick with emotion. "But I do know that I can't lose you again. I don't care about the past anymore. I want you, Scarlett. I want to be here for you. I just need you to give me a chance to make it right."

Scarlett sat back on the couch, staring at him. Her heart was heavy, torn between the past and the present. She didn't know if she could forgive him for leaving her, for disappearing without a word, but she knew one thing for sure she couldn't just let him walk away again. Not without hearing what he had to say.

"I don't know if I can just forget everything, Noah," she said, her voice shaky. "But I can't keep living in the past. Not anymore."

Noah nodded, his eyes filled with both regret and hope. "I'm not asking you to forget," he said softly.

“I’m asking you to give me a chance to make it right. To let me show you that I can be the person you need. Please, Scarlett, let me try. I even threatened Laim and Henry to tell you the truth, that’s why they weren’t talking to you.”

The room fell quiet again, but this time, the silence didn’t feel as heavy. There was something unspoken between them, something that had been buried for so long, now finally coming to the surface.

“You can’t just leave her like that,” she said, her voice a little shaky now. “Just yesterday was your engagement party. You’re still wearing the ring, Noah. How do you expect me to just walk into your life again like nothing happened? I can’t hurt her like that. I won’t be that girl.”

Noah sighed, running a hand through his wet hair, still damp from the rain. “Scarlett, it’s not what you think. Mona and I were never really in love. Not the way you think. We cared about each other, but it was never deep.”

Scarlett frowned. “But why even get engaged, then?”

He leaned forward, resting his arms on his knees. "Our boss suggested it. Said if we got married, we'd be transferred to another airline, better pay, more opportunities. It was kind of a deal. A business move. We thought it would help both of us, but the truth is, it didn't fix anything."

She didn't say anything for a moment, just listened.

He went on, quietly. "I never even told her the story behind my tattoo. You remember how you used to ask me why the infinity sign? I got it with you. You were the reason. But when she asked, I just said it was something random from my past. I never told her your name, never told her who you were."

He stopped, eyes meeting hers. "Because I couldn't. Because it always belonged to you. "Scarlett's eyes shimmered with emotion, but she looked away. "She doesn't deserve this. She doesn't deserve to be left in the dark."

Noah nodded slowly. "I know. And I'll talk to her. I'll fix it."

Weeks later, Noah sat across from Mona in their quiet apartment. There was no yelling, no fighting

this time, just silence that filled the space between them like something heavy.

Mona spoke first. "So... it's really over?" Noah nodded. "Yeah. I think it's been over for a while now. We were holding on for the wrong reasons. "She looked down at her hands. "I guess deep down, I knew. We were always more like teammates than a couple."

He gave a small, sad smile. "I'll always care about you, Mona. But this isn't love. Not the kind that lasts." She stood up and walked over to him, giving him one last hug. "You're right. I hope you find the kind that does." Noah hugged her back. "You too."

She smiled through tears. "Take care of yourself, okay?"

"You too," he said.

And just like that, she turned and walked away, with a quiet, clean end to something that was never meant to last. And Noah was finally free to start over, with honesty, with courage, with Scarlett.

